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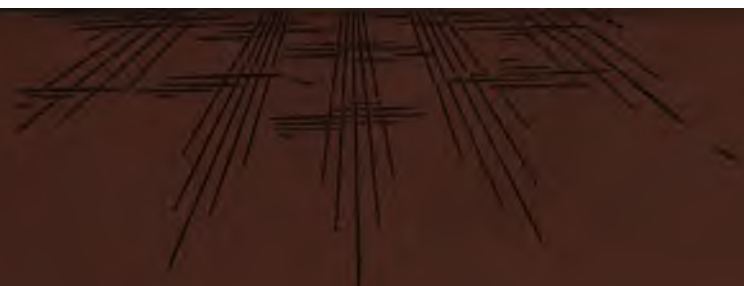
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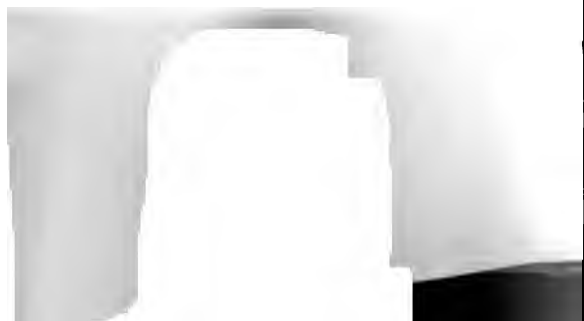
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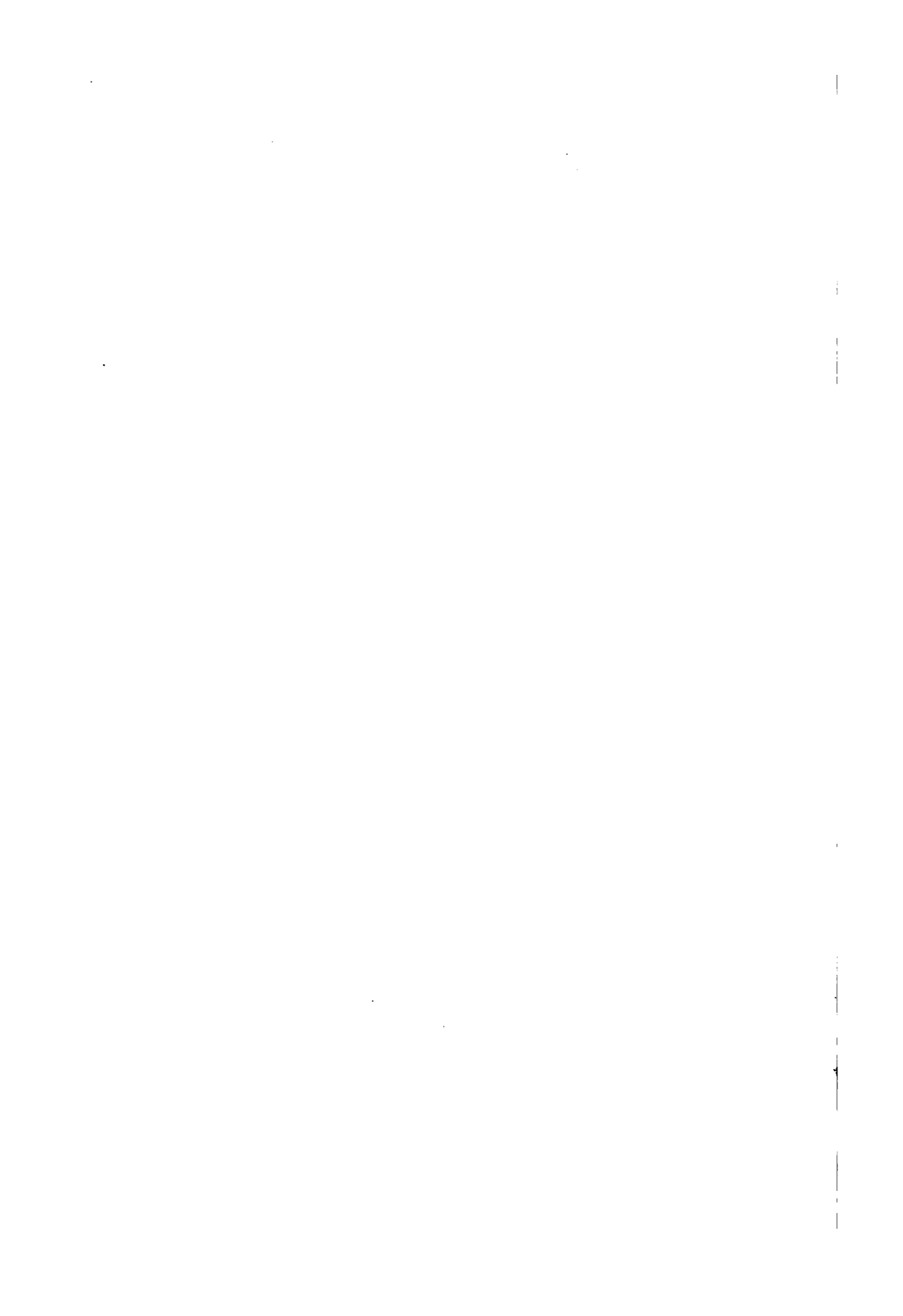


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# GOD AND THE MAN

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*'He sat and gazed into her eyes.'*

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# GOD AND THE MAN

*A ROMANCE*

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF 'A CHILD OF NATURE' 'THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD'

'THE GREAT GOD CASTETH AWAY NO MAN'



IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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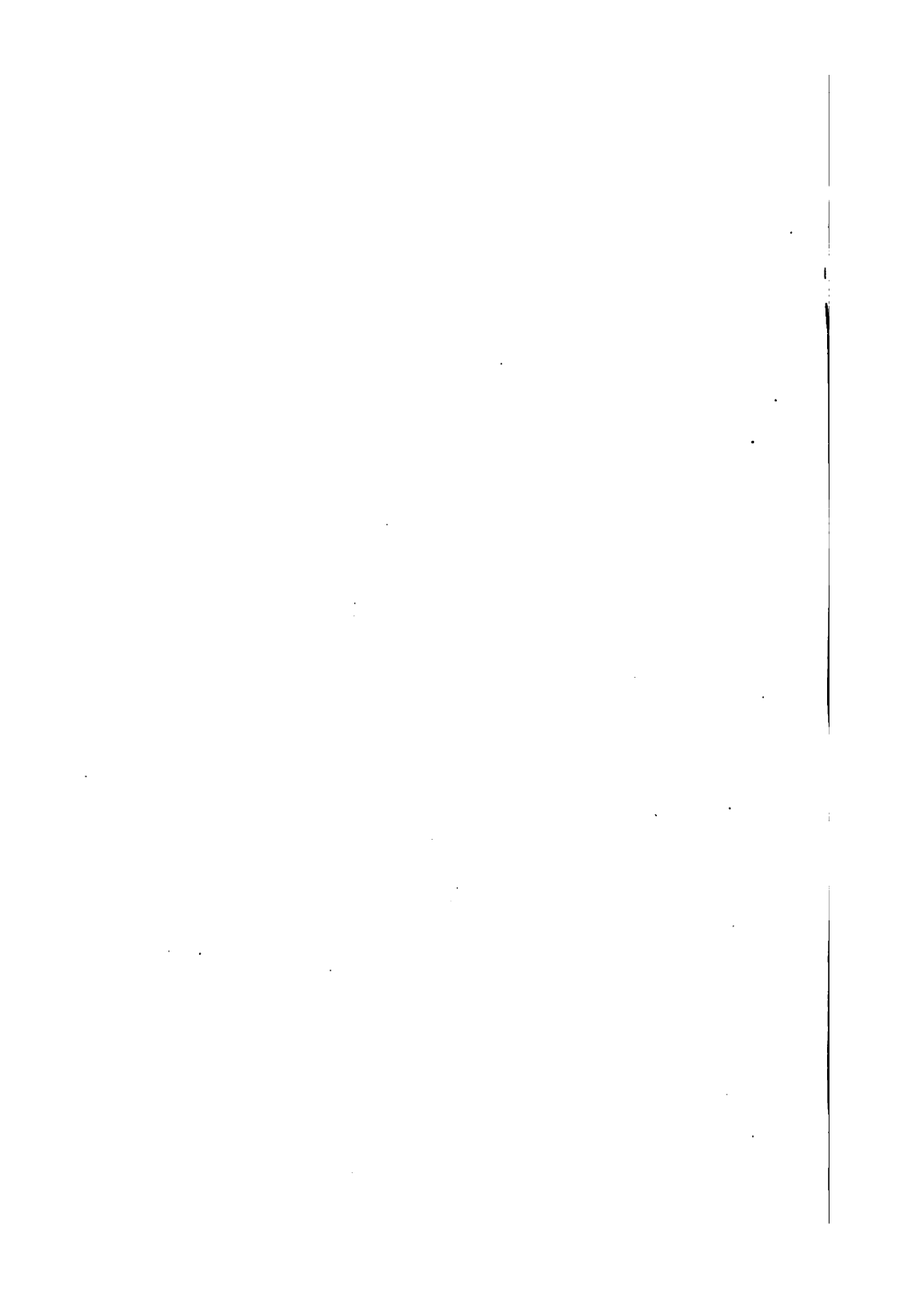
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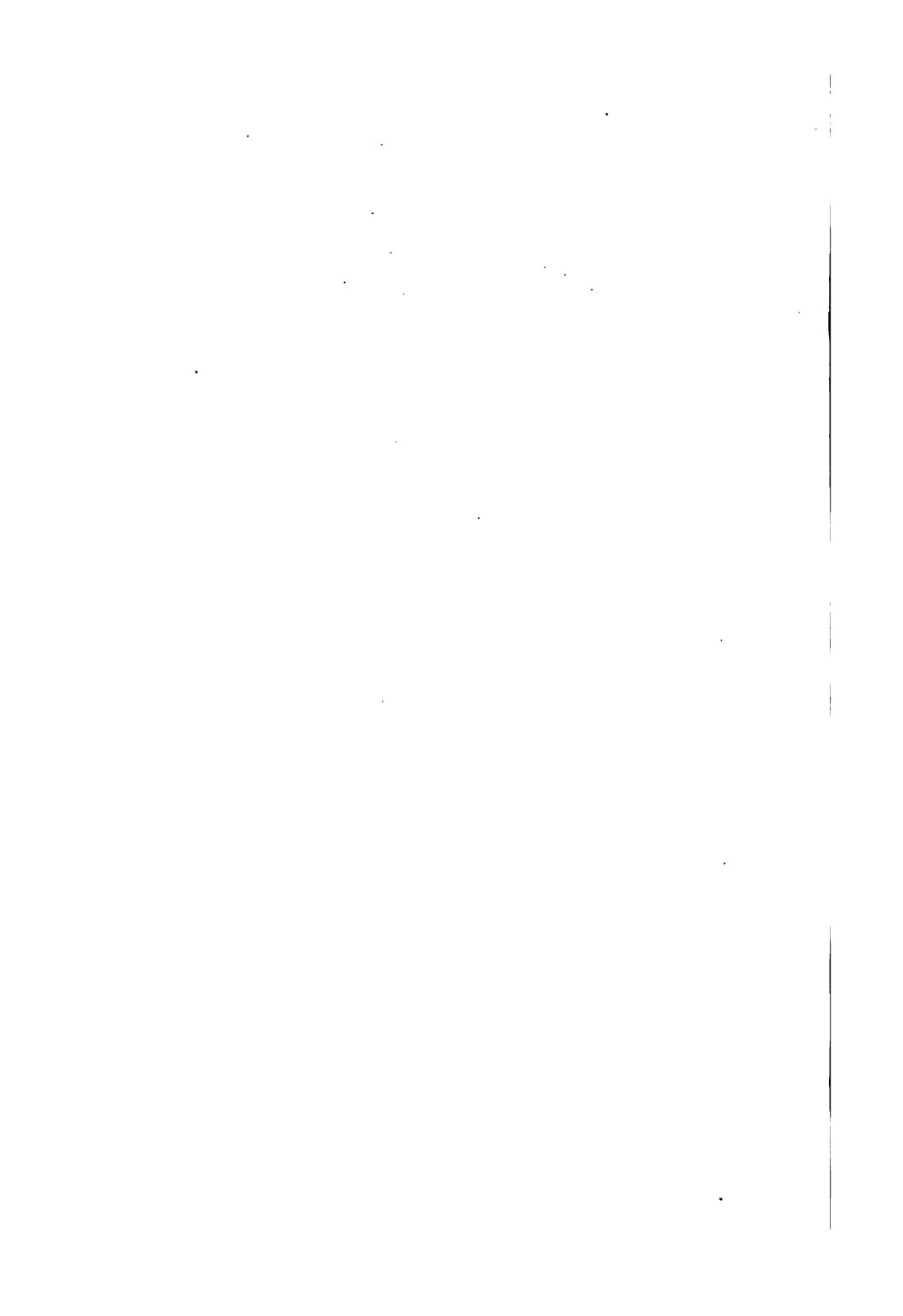
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# GOD AND THE MAN.

## CHAPTER I.

### KATE CHRISTIANSON'S TROUBLE.

THE stream of our narrative now turns aside to follow Kate Christianson. On parting from Richard Orchardson, she moved rapidly away through the surrounding shrubberies, following a foot-path that she knew well, and which led her to the loneliest part of Squire Orchardson's demesne. As she went she kept up a low moaning, like one in pain, and looked neither to right nor left; indeed, she seemed, for the time being, deaf and

blind to the objects around her. At last she paused, in the shadow of a small plantation, not far from the highway, and sitting down upon a bank, hid her face in her hands and rocked herself to and fro.

She waited thus for hours, as if half stupefied. The place was solitary, and no one beheld her, or heard the low moaning which still came from her mouth. The setting sun touched her with a finger of crimson fire, but she did not see or feel it. Not till it was nearly dark did she rise to her feet and move away.

Her mind seemed now made up. She returned to the highway; concealing her face with her cloak, and shrinking from every form she met, she hastened homeward; passed rapidly through the village, and took the lane leading down to the waste mere. That some desperate purpose animated her was evident from her

gestures ; for ever and anon she threw her arms in the air, and uttered a cry to God.

Quitting the lane, she ran across a water-meadow, and came upon the side of the mere. The sun had just disappeared, but a faint reflected light still hung over the scene, and in that light the dark water looked more than ever sombre and forbidding. She looked at the black shallows, she looked at the sad chill sky. Shuddering, she shrank back, and began to sob. The hot tears came, and saved her from self-murder. No, she could not die—not at least that way.

‘O God!’ she cried. ‘What shall I do? what shall I do?’

Then, in her despair and fear, she thought she would return home. She was not yet missed, and it was not too late to return and take her place in the house.

And even if the worst came to the worst, she would fall upon her knees, tell the truth—part of it, not all—no, no, not all—and perhaps they might forgive her. Even if they killed her, what then? She wished to die, though she lacked the courage to go flying up and falling at God's feet, a suicide.

Even as she turned her face towards the farm, something stirred within her, like the quickening of another life within her own. A new horror passed through her. Then, as if she had been pursued, and flying in mortal terror, she fled away—not homeward, but across the darkened fields.

A thick white vapour was rising from the cold earth; she passed through it like a ghost, from meadow to meadow, from field to field, instinctively familiar with every step of the way, though sight was useless

to guide her. Before long, she was out upon the open road, and walking rapidly away from her native village.

Her mind was now made up. She would leave her home, and seek shelter as far away from pursuit as possible ; for she knew now that if she lingered even a single day, her shame would in all probability be discovered. With a sickening horror in her heart, and her brain stupefied with a nameless dread, she fled on, and on.

Poor Kate was country-bred, and in youth had learned the free use of her limbs in all manner of rustic exercise ; so although her mind was crushed down and darkened, her body still retained a certain strength. She walked on with little or no consciousness of fâ-tigue until two hours before midnight ; by that time she had left her home ten long miles behind her. She

found herself on a solitary highway, crossing level flats, with a clear view of the open moonlit sea.

By this time she had partially recovered her self-possession, and with the instinct of a hunted thing, when the first flash of fear has passed, began to plan her movements with a certain cunning. Not many miles away, she knew, was a small seaport town, from which ships sometimes sailed to distant parts—even as far as London, she had heard. She would reach the town and go on shipboard, first sending a message to those at home and entreating their forgiveness. After that, she cared not what became of her. She would creep to some lonely corner of the world, and bury herself past all search, all remembrance.

On the road before her she saw lights burning, and pressing on, she found that they came from a little roadside inn. The

door was closed, and there seemed no company indoors; but she went up and knocked timidly.

Some chains were loosened and a bolt drawn; a shock-haired head looked out upon her, that of a man holding a rush-light. He glared at her with true country suspicion.

‘Who be there?’ he growled. ‘A woman! What d’ye want at this hour o’ night?’

‘How far away, good man, to Norton-by-the-Sea?’

The man looked at her suspiciously for a few moments before he replied.

‘To Norton? Why, five mile and more. Be you going there to-night?’

‘Yes.’

Reassured by her obvious timidity of manner, the man threw open the door, and came out upon the threshold.



‘Let me have a look at thee,’ he cried, holding the light to her face. ‘Where do you come from, that call so late? You be a stranger, mistress?’

‘Yes, that I be! Good-night, and thank you kindly.’

‘Stop!’ cried the man. ‘If you be a stranger, and come o’ decent folk, you can ha’ a bed here for payment, a clean bed and supper too, if you will. ’Tis time all honest folk should be a-bed, and there be bad chaps about these roads.’

But Kate would not rest yet. She thanked the man, and turned away.

‘Good-night,’ she said again.

‘Good-night,’ growled the man, and closed the door upon her.

She walked on for another hour; then she saw, far away before her, the lights of the town she sought. The sight gave her new strength, and she hastened towards it.

By midnight, she was on the skirts of the town. All was very still; no one stirring. She went on, looking for some place where she might knock for shelter. As she did so, she felt the same sickening and terrifying sensation that she had felt by the mere side. In a moment she became dizzy, tottered to a doorstep, and without a sound, fainted away.

When Kate Christianson opened her eyes she found herself in a strange room lying upon a truckle bed. She started up with a cry, and gazed with a terrified look around her.

The next moment she sank back moaning upon the bed. She was alone; the room, a wretched garret, was strange to her; it was evidently night, for a guttering rushlight burnt dimly on the table, and all the house was hushed.

What had happened? She could not tell, but something terrible must have taken place, for her brain was throbbing, her lips and eyes burning feverishly, and her hand, which looked so white and thin, was clammy and cold, as if with the chilly touch of death.

For a time she lay with her burning eyelids closed, and her poor weary overwrought brain trying to recall the past; then some movement attracted her attention, she opened her eyes and looked around again. This time she saw that she was not alone. On a wicker arm-chair beside a smouldering fire, a woman was seated.

She had evidently been sleeping, but her face was now turned somewhat anxiously towards the bed. Their eyes met; she came over and took the girl's wasted hand kindly in her own.

'Where am I?' said Kate, faintly;

then overcome by her own weakness, she burst into tears.

It was some time before she could calm herself again ; but while she sobbed the woman patted her hand, and did her best to soothe her again to sleep.

But Kate was too excited to rest ; question after question came eagerly from her feverish lips, until at length she knew all. Yes, thus she learned that two days before the master of the garret had lifted her senseless form from the ground, had borne her to his room, and committed her to the care of his wife ; that a few hours after a child had been born prematurely, and that since that hour the mother, stricken with fever, had lain almost at the point of death.

‘The child, the child?’ gasped the agonised girl. The woman, mistaking her agonised cry, said softly,

‘ Don’t grieve, poor wench : the poor little ba’rn is dead.’

For one moment the girl’s parched, feverish lips opened to breathe a word of thankfulness to God ; then, overcome by her own misery, she uttered a heart-breaking cry, and burst again into weary sobs and tears.

Kate learned little more that night, for the woman, alarmed at her excessive grief, refused to speak again ; she returned to her seat by the fire, and left Kate to lie and think over all that had taken place. What a night she passed ! As every weary hour dragged by, the fever which had seized her seemed to increase.

In the morning, the woman, going to the bedside, found that the fever had reached its height, and the poor patient was raving in wild delirium.

And for several days more Kate Christianson was as one gone mad, she raved

in the height of fever ; then her feverishness abated, and her senses returned to her. Her child had been buried, and the people, grown weary of the mystery, were anxiously inquiring who the unfortunate mother might be.

‘What is your name, wench ? tell me, and I’ll write to your friends,’ asked the woman for the twentieth time one day.

‘I have no friends,’ said Kate wearily.  
‘I want to die !’

Then she thought of her mother, of her brother, of the man who had brought all this sorrow upon her, and prayed again to die. But her prayers were vain,—God had deserted her ; she still lived, and her troubles grew.

What could she do ? To stay there was impossible, to return to her mother was impossible ; she resolved to seek the father of her child, and cast herself on his

protection. To do this, she must escape alone; to reveal her plans would be to reveal her identity, to bring all her terrible secret to light, and call down shame and sorrow upon those she loved.

She would tell no one of her wild desire; she would creep from the house at dead of night, and fade like an evil shadow from the place. Daylight died, and night came on: the invalid seemed better and inclined for sleep, and the poor woman who had attended her so kindly retired to get that rest of which she was herself in need.

‘You shall write to my friends in the morning,’ Kate had said. ‘Prithee let me pass this night in peace!’

‘In peace; nay, in this world there is no peace for me!’ she murmured a few hours later, as she rose from her sick-bed and tremblingly drew on her clothes.

It was several hours past midnight; every sound was hushed, all within the house were sleeping peacefully, as the sick girl, dragging her trembling limbs along the floor, descended the stairs and passed quietly from the house.

There was a bolt to the door; with trembling hands she slid it back, and then, at the sound, stood shivering and listened. No one stirred. She opened the door stealthily, slipt out, and drew it to behind her. She stood in the empty street of the sleeping town, hesitating, bewildered, not knowing what to do.

It was the dark hour that precedes the dawn, but the silvern moonlight was lingering in placid places of the heavens. The air was very cold, for during the night there had been rain, and some was still falling in a thin imperceptible mist.

Kate looked wildly round her. The



cool air came sweetly upon her fevered brow, the damp dew fell upon her loosened hair. All seemed so still, so peaceful. As she paused in hesitation, all her past life came upon her as in a dream. Her eyes filled with tears. With trembling feet, she turned her face towards home.

Yes, she would go back. In the place where she had been hidden no one knew her, no one could follow. If she hastened, she might reach her native village before the world was well astir. And even if the news of her shame should follow her, what then? She would lie down and die in the old place, and they would place her in the little green churchyard, by her poor father's side.

In the light of a golden summer morning, pleasant and peaceful after a night of rain, Priscilla Sefton rose, and looked out

of the little attic window of the cottage at Brightlinghead. The garden lay beneath, newly baptised in morning dew ; and across green slopes beyond, sparkled the innumerable laughter of the sea. She opened the casement ; the scent of flowers crept sweetly in. She listened ; and heard birds singing, as if it were the world's first day.

Coming down into the little parlour, she found her father already up, and awaiting her. They knelt down in loving prayer together, as their custom was, and then began their simple morning meal. After breakfast, Priscilla walked out into the garden, leaving the blind man seated in his chair, in those holy meditations which were necessary to him as the very breath of life.

As she moved in the sunshine, plucking a flower here and there, the garden

gate opened, and Richard Orchardson appeared. He was booted and spurred, and carried in his hand a nosegay and a basket of choice fruit from the manor garden.

‘I am an early visitor,’ he said smiling. ‘My father hath sent me over with these nectarines for Mr. Sefton, and some rare flowers for yourself. I was bidden also to ask you to become our guests for a few days up at the Willows.’

‘My father is within,’ returned Priscilla with a certain coldness. ‘Will you come and speak to him?’

‘Presently,’ said Richard, lingering by her side. ‘What a fair morning!’

‘Yes.’

Her manner seemed unusually thoughtful and reserved, and the young man at once noticed the change. Instead of looking him in the face as was her wont,

she kept her gaze averted, and moved slowly towards the cottage.

'Do not go in yet,' said Richard quickly. 'I wish to speak to you.'

Without speaking, she turned, and for the first time looked him in the face. She saw something there which caused a shadow to fall upon her own.

'My father is waiting for me,' she said, embarrassed, but not agitated, as she had been when she saw the same expression in the face of Christian Christianson.

'Pray listen a moment,' persisted Richard. 'I have ridden over on purpose to see you. I must speak to you; alone.'

Seeing now that it was inevitable, she paused, but the shadow remained upon her.

'Dear Priscilla—nay, suffer me to

call you so—when you know what hath brought me, perchance you will pity me; without your pity, surely I am a lost man. Since you came hither to Brightlinghead, there hath been but one thought in my soul—how I might make myself worthy in your eyes. I have spoken with my father, and he approves what I am about to say to you. Priscilla, will you become my wife?’

Even now, her colour did not change, though she looked nervously upon the ground. Encouraged by her silence, which he misconstrued, he took her hand, and proceeded in a strain of greater confidence and gallantry.

‘Sweetheart, I am sure you could not have misconceived me. The face is a tell-tale, and sure mine hath betrayed me from the first. Nay, did I not hint the truth before, though my sweet was too

roguish to understand! Let me speak to your father straight, and tell him that I have won your heart.'

'Nay,' returned Priscilla, 'for it is not true.'

Richard still kept her hand.

'You will not refuse me, Priscilla. I am the squire's son, and though I say it, shall be a rich man. I know you are poor in the world's goods' (here he watched her keenly, to see the effect of his words), 'but in you I shall have a treasure far surpassing gold. And you shall be a great lady! There shall ever be maids at your elbow, horses for you to ride, a grand house for great company, and troops of gentle friends.'

'Such things are not for me,' said Priscilla simply. 'Prithee speak of it no more.'

'Perchance you will chide me because

I am so bold—but it is your heavenly beauty that leads me on. Sweetheart, I love you!—ay, more than all the world!’

As he spoke, Priscilla started and uttered a half-terrified cry. Surprised, he turned and followed the direction of her eyes. At the same moment he heard a low voice, the sound of which chilled the blood in his veins.

‘Richard!’

On the garden path before them stood a woman, wild-eyed, ghastly pale, woe-begone, her raiment soaked with the night’s rain, her hair falling loose upon her shoulders. As she uttered his name, wild tears ran down her cheeks, and she fell moaning upon her knees, and stretching out her arms to him in wild entreaty.

## CHAPTER II.

## KATE COMES HOME.

THE young couple stood petrified, but the woman, after uttering that terrible cry, fell prostrate upon the ground.

Priscilla rushed forward, raised her gently, gave one look into the pale, sorrow-stricken face, and then turned to Richard Orchardson.

‘ Who is she ? ’ she asked ; ‘ she named your name, and seemed to know you. And I—I seem to have seen her face before. You know her, friend ? ’

He was standing upon the spot where Priscilla had stood two minutes before, but he had almost turned his back upon the



two girls; he stood so, as he answered Priscilla's question.

'Yes, I know her well,' he said; 'we have known each other since we were children. Her name is Kate Christianson; she is a daughter of Dame Christianson of the Fen Farm.'

'Kate Christianson!—his sister Kate—ah, I remember.'

Richard Orchardson turned now—turned and looked at Priscilla with quite a new light in his eyes, and the terror which a few moments before had filled his heart was replaced by a feeling of bitter irritation. The tone in which Priscilla had uttered those few words had told him something. She had been deaf to his proposal because, forsooth, her heart had been turned towards another man, and that man was his bitterest foe!

Priscilla, meanwhile, for the time un

conscious of the presence of her would-be lover, was still bending over the form of the unconscious girl, chafing her hands, smoothing back her hair, and allowing the sun to shine upon her face.

Then, as there were still no signs of returning consciousness, she turned to Richard again.

‘Will you help me to bear her into the house?’ she said. ‘I thank the Lord who did direct her footsteps to our door.’

For a time the man remained silent, utterly at a loss what to say or do. He was like one tossed hither and thither on conflicting tides, each one of which seemed likely to engulf him. Of the strange turn of events which had brought Kate Christianson to her present pitiable state he knew almost nothing, neither could he guess the motive which had led the girl to Priscilla Sefton’s door. But of this he felt certain,

that should she be carried into the house, and there recover her consciousness, his cause with Priscilla would be lost. What to do? how to avoid the catastrophe? His heart sickened within him, and he inwardly prayed that every breath which the unconscious woman drew might be her last.

But Priscilla awaiting his answer, presently he spoke,

‘Sweetheart,’ he said, ‘your kind disposition doth you wrong. Such women as that are best outside your door. Take my advice, send her to the Fen Farm, and when she passeth beyond the sunshine of this spot think of her no more.’

‘Why do you speak so?’ asked Priscilla.

‘Because I know ’tis sacrilege for one roof to cover you two.’

‘Sacrilege! nay, then, I tell you ’tis

my duty to attend to such sore trouble as this—a Christian's help is given where it is needed ; the prosperous and the happy do not call us, but we listen for the voices of those in distress. What saith the Lord ? —“ Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” Therefore, good Master Richard, I prithee call my father, who will give me what help I need !’

But Orchardson did not seem inclined to do that.

‘ Forgive me, Priscilla,’ he said ; ‘ I was wrong and you have put me right. You will always keep me right, sweetheart, and I would do anything to please you !’

So saying, he lifted the unconscious Kate in his arms and carried her into the house ; when he had placed her upon the bed he turned again to Priscilla.

‘ Sweetheart,’ he said softly, ‘ can I do

more for thee? In sooth, though I have no cause to love the name of Christianson, I feel grieved for the poor wench, and would gladly serve her. 'Tis a sad story, now I remember. The maiden disappeared from her home several days ago, and all at the Fen Farm believe her dead.'

Priscilla did not reply; she was bending over the sick girl, trying to find some glimmer of returning consciousness; but none came. She lay like one stone dead.

Priscilla raised her head.

'You have your horse at the gate, good friend?'

'Yes.'

'Then you will gallop away with two letters from me—one for the doctor, one for Christian Christianson.'

The young squire's face reddened; he was about to give a hasty refusal, when he suddenly checked himself, and said,

‘Whatsoever *you* wish, I will do.’

Priscilla immediately proceeded to scribble off two notes. The one to Christian ran as follows :—

‘MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your sister lieth under this roof, grievously sick. An hour ago, as I stood at the gate giving good morning to young Squire Orchardson, a weary woman staggered up and fell at my feet. The young squire, recognising her sooner than I, told me her name ; he carried her into the house for me, and is now waiting to be the bearer of two letters, one to the doctor, and this one to yourself. You will come, good friend, as soon as you receive this ; and in the meantime I shall do all in my power for the poor sick maid.

‘Your faithful friend,

‘PRISCILLA SEFTON.’

Priscilla, while sealing this letter, felt that she had phrased it well. The wish had of late become strong within her to be the peacemaker between these two men, for to her gentle nature the hatred which they bore to one another was terrible beyond endurance. So in despatching this missive Priscilla thought that by judiciously mentioning the service of young Orchardson, she would at least gain for him his enemy's thanks.

As Orchardson took the lines, he was gratified at receiving a sweet word of thanks from Priscilla, and an earnestly expressed hope that she would soon see him again.

'For of course,' she added, quickly, suddenly remembering their conversation of a few hours before, 'you will be curious to hear how the poor maid goeth on.'

'I shall be very curious,' returned Orchardson, as bending over her hands he

pressed them affectionately, then took his leave.

He delivered the doctor's note himself—the other he gave to a boy; for much as he wished to serve Priscilla, he could not bring himself to ride up as a messenger to the Fen Farm.

Having done his work he rode leisurely homewards.

He was in anything but a comfortable frame of mind, though he had decided what must be his own course of action. So far, he had been fortunate, the girl had remained senseless; but sooner or later she must recover, and then, perhaps, Priscilla might learn all. At first he had thought of communicating with Kate, and trying to ensure her silence; but now he had decided upon a better plan. She had no witnesses; if she accused he could deny; nay, more, he could put this forth



as another evidence of the wish of the Christiansons to disgrace him and drag him down.

On reaching home he found his father about to sally forth ; at sight of his son's face the old man turned and re-entered the house.

'Well, lad ?' he questioned, laying his hand affectionately on Richard's shoulder, 'how sped thy wooing ?'

'I am baulked again by a Christian-son.'

'Curse them,—curse the whole breed !'

'So say I, father ; Priscilla was gentle as a lamb until his runaway sister staggered up and fell at her feet. Then her heart melted, and she forgot me ; bade me help the girl into her house, and then despatched a message for her brother. My suit will never thrive with Priscilla till the Christiansons are away.'

For three days young Orchardson nursed his wrath against the Christiansons, but mostly against Kate; and during the whole of that time he was in a state of terror as to how matters would end between Priscilla and himself. On his own course of action he had, as we have said, fully decided, but for a time he shrank from the idea of meeting the girl, and commencing the false tales which he knew he should have to tell.

But gradually he grew accustomed to the thought of them, and on the evening of the fourth day he had conquered himself sufficiently to walk down to the cottage at Brightlinghead, ostensibly with the intention of inquiring how the poor outcast fared, but really to discover how much of her sad story had been told to Priscilla.

It was long past sunset, the evening

prayer-meeting at the cottage was over, the small congregation had dispersed, and Priscilla herself, a light shawl thrown over her head, was walking up and down the road in the fast-gathering twilight.

She was much paler and more pensive-looking than usual, but when her eyes fell upon the young man her face brightened with a strange smile.

He saw at once that he was safe. 'Good Mr. Richard, you are welcome,' she said, 'I was thinking of thee!'

The young man's heart grew light. He kissed the hand which she gave him, then held forth a posy of his father's choicest flowers.

'I have come to inquire for your patient,' he said quietly, 'and my father hath sent these flowers to cheer thee in the sick-room.'

'Your father is too good. When you return, thank him for me.'

And she took the flowers, and held them to her sweet face.

For the moment he felt impelled to give an affectionate reply, but remembering that to be too precipitate might mean the loss of all, he contented himself with watching Priscilla's beautiful pale face as it bent above the nosegay to inhale the posy's fragrant breath.

'They are very sweet,' said Priscilla, softly, 'but indeed I have no sick-room to put them into now. Our poor little maid hath gone away.'

'Gone away?' echoed Orchardson, and for a moment there arose within him a wild hope that Kate Christianson might be dead.

But Priscilla quietly replied,

'Yes, so soon as she was strong enough to move her brother took her home.'

After that they both remained silent.

Orchardson longed yet dreaded to hear more, and Priscilla knew not what to say. Her scheme of becoming peacemaker between these two strange men had completely fallen through. But since she could not make peace, she would try not to create a stronger hatred. She would never mention to Orchardson how Christian, on hearing that the man had dared to touch his sister even in kindness, had shown ungovernable wrath, and had in his frenzy even accused Priscilla of wishing to humiliate him before his foe.

He had succeeded in arousing the gentle maiden's wrath at last. But the anguish which had followed her wrath told her only too plainly the state of her heart.

'I will go away,' she had said to herself. 'We have no longer any mission here. It requires a stronger will than mine to lead these men from the errors

into which they are falling. God is far-seeing, and He may choose some other means of bringing them right at last.'

'Will you come in?' asked the girl, quietly; but Orchardson shook his head.

'Not to-night, Priscilla. If I may, I will come again. Good-night, and may God bless you!'

He uttered the benediction with strange earnestness, then he bent again and kissed her hands. For that night at least he spoke no word of love, but walked away with a strange look of relief, like one reprieved from death.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE WIDOW'S CUP IS FULL.

RICHARD ORCHARDSON might breathe in peace. Kate Christianson, in recovering from her swoon, said nothing to incriminate him or herself, but answered all questions with vague words and moans. Then Christian Christianson had indeed taken his poor sister home, and the shock of the removal had again overpowered her, and for many hours she lay like one stricken unto death.

The mother and brother watched her ; each looking, wondering, but saying nothing. Not even to each other in the silence of the night had they spoken of

the terrible fear which was heavy upon the hearts of both.

For a time they thought that the girl would die, and the mother in her anguish and suspicion guessed at times that it might be better so ; but God willed it otherwise ; Kate gradually recovered—arose from bed, the mere ghost of what she once had been, and again resumed her place in the house. This was a hard time for Kate, for now that her delirium had passed away, Dame Christianson, unable longer to restrain her anxiety, began to question her daughter as to the past.

But Kate had the tenacity and reticence of some otherwise feeble natures. She would say nothing. She gazed into her mother's stern, cold face with pitiful pleading, and when pressed closely, fell into violent paroxysms, and in her anguish wildly prayed that she might die.



So it came to pass one evening that Dame Christianson, sitting by the fire with the old Bible upon her knee, looked at the trembling, cowering figure before her, and resolutely steeled her heart.

‘Thou wilt not speak, thou wilt tell me naught,’ she said, ‘but for all that I fear that thou art not fit to share this roof with righteous folk. If it cometh to pass that thou hast brought shame upon our name, I will turn thee like a dog from our door!’

‘Mother, mother!’ cried the trembling girl.

But the stern old woman held up her hands.

‘Call me not mother till I hear thy tale. Perchance thy sin is not so great as I deem it, but since thou triest to break my heart, do not name my name.

Here in thy father's house is food and shelter, but while thou hidest aught from me, thou art no child of mine!

So Kate sobbed and cried, and rocked herself in her agony of grief; the mother read the Bible, looking up now and again to watch the tear-stained face of her daughter—but neither spoke.

When Christian came in from his work in the fields, she quietly did what work was required of her, then, like a stricken hound, she crept up to her room. As she was leaving the chamber for the night, Christian called her back.

'Good-night, Katie,' he said.

The sound of the old childish name, spoken so fondly by her stern brother, was too much for poor Kate to bear. Pausing, she held up her sunken cheek for her brother's kiss, then, with one last look into her mother's stern face, she crept

upstairs, and having gained her room sank on the floor in passionate tears.

When she was gone and the door was closed, the mother and son spake no word. Christian, whose heart had melted for a moment at sight of his sister's silent pain, had far different thoughts to occupy his brain. Only two hours before he had met Priscilla on the sands, and received her last farewell.

Yes, Priscilla was gone from Brightlinghead; she had come like a spirit of light and love, to bring gladness to the hearts of many, but now the Divine Hand which ruled her life pointed onwards, and again she followed her blind father forth into the wilderness of the world.

Well, it was some comfort to Christian that she had wished to say 'good-bye'—that she had given him a few words of

counsel, and expressed a hope that they might some day meet again.

‘We have both our work to do,’ she said, sweetly, ‘you as well as I. God give you strength to do it manfully and well, dear Christian.’

‘Priscilla!’ he cried, wildly, ‘before you go, hearken again!’

But Priscilla put up her hand.

‘Nay, we have both said o’ermuch already. Good-bye, and may God bless you, dear friend.’

‘God’s blessing comes to me through you only; when you are gone it will be to me as if I had been plunged into the darkest depths of hell!’

‘Alas! say not so.’

‘But I say so, in good sooth. Give me some hope, Priscilla! Leave me not to waste and die. With your help, I might become a better man.’

The girl shook her head, sadly.

‘I have tried,’ she murmured, faintly; ‘and I have failed. My place is with my father, and even if I were free, I should fear your disposition. Good-bye, dear Christian! Perchance we may meet again some day, soon, and till then, remember me!’

With such words upon her lips, and a calm, placid smile upon her face, she had faded from his sight.

The memory of that interview was ever in his mind, the light of that sweet smile ever before his eyes, making the world seem brighter to him, and softening his heart to all mankind.

To-night, particularly, Priscilla’s influence was strong upon him, as he sat looking at his mother’s stern, cold face, and thinking of his heart-broken sister.

‘Perchance she is too hard,’ he

thought; 'perchance we are both too hard. Poor Kate! if she hath sinned, she suffers sorely.'

A little later, when he went upstairs, he looked into his sister's room. Kate's passionate pain had passed away; pale and exhausted she sat now upon the bedside.

'Kate, my lass,' said Christian, going up to her, and lifting one of her wasted hands, 'the mother's heart is sore because she loveth you—remember that; maybe, the soreness will pass away, and she'll come right again. She hath had overmuch trouble, Kate, and it makes her hard sometimes; but she loves you; nay, we all love you.'

The girl said nothing; with the docility and timidity of a poor dumb animal, she pressed her cold, trembling lips to her

brother's hand, and sank back again upon the bed.

But when he was gone, and she was alone again, alone with her load of sorrow, which was surely breaking her heart, she moaned aloud in anguish :—

‘ If he knew, if he only knew ! would he not curse me as my mother would curse me ? would he not drive me forth as she would drive me forth ? Yea, even although it sent me to my death. What shall I do ? Dear God, what shall I do ? I cannot live like this, I cannot go out into the world. If only I could die ! ’

She wiped away her tears, tried to calm her ever beating heart, and sat down to think. What *could* she do ? Nothing, nothing ! Confess to her mother that she had grievously sinned, and that Richard Orchardson, the mortal enemy of their house, had won her love, and afterwards

brought her to shame? Nay, for then with a mother's curse she would be driven forth to become a hopeless outcast on the pitiless street.

Suddenly, in the midst of her blackest despair, came a ray of hope, a ray so bright that for the moment the dead light in the girl's eye kindled into something of its old brightness. She thought of Priscilla Sefton, the blind missionary's daughter; she was known to be good and kind, she must have guessed part of the pitiful story,—she should learn the rest, and perhaps her good counsel might bring the poor sufferer some peace. Yes, Kate resolved to seek Priscilla on the morrow; and with that thought to comfort her, she sank to rest, little dreaming what new trials the morrow was to bring forth.

After a troubled night, Kate Christian-son arose, weary and unrefreshed. Though



it was still early, yet the grey light of dawn was stealing into the house. Christian was already afield, but the dame was still in her room. Dressing herself with somewhat more than ordinary care, Kate crept downstairs, and set herself to perform her few household duties. Having finished these, she hastily drew on her bonnet and shawl and left the house.

She was obliged to go thus early, for in five minutes more her mother would be down, and would be sure to ply her with a series of questions as to her going forth. But now that she was free and fairly on her road her heart turned sick within her. 'Twas such a sorry errand! Well, it was part of her punishment, and as such it must be bravely borne.

Nevertheless she lingered on her road, choosing the quiet, unfrequented paths, and withdrawing aside whenever a human

soul came by, so that when she arrived at Brightlinghead the day was well broken. What was Kate's surprise, however, to find the cottage door closed, the blinds all drawn, and no sign of life about it anywhere!

She walked resolutely up to the door and knocked. No answer. She knocked again: the sound of her knuckles on the door reverberated through the house, but brought no sign of life. At this moment an old coastguardsman happened to pass by.

'What be you wanting there, mistress?' he asked gruffly; and Kate meekly replied,

'I came to seek the preacher's daughter.'

'Mistress Sefton? She be gone away.'

'Gone!'

'Ay; travelled away with her father.'

They are wanderers always, it seems, and never bide in one place long.'

'Then they are not coming back?'

'Nay; leastways not for many a day!'

Trembling, and more sick at heart than ever, Kate moved from the door, and began to retrace her steps along the road.

What to do now? There was only one plan left, and that was to seek out Richard Orchardson. That he had ceased to care for her, Kate knew only too well; her only hope was that her sorry state might at least arouse his pity. But how to find him; how to speak with him? She might wait all day and never see him, and she dared not go to the Willows. Dared not?—nay but she would! Trouble had made her desperate. If she sent to him he would avoid her—of that she felt sure; the only way was to bring him right

before her face. Full of this new determination, yet shrinking fearfully from the task she had to perform, Kate drew her shawl more tightly about her shoulders, and looked around with a shiver. The day was well advanced, but it was cold and dark and sunless. She walked on and on till she was some distance from the Willows, but she knew there was life there, for she could see the smoke issuing from the chimneys, and she could hear the echoing bark of the mastiffs which were always chained in the yard. With flushed cheek and wildly palpitating heart, Kate walked on, never once pausing to think until she came to the lodge gate.

Then good fortune attended her; for she met one of the grooms coming out of the gate.

‘Will you tell me,’ she asked, in a low

trembling voice, 'if Master Richard is at home?'

'Master Richard? Nay!'

'Where is he?'

'Don't 'ee know he's gone away to London?'

'Gone away!'

'Ay, went away a week ago, and he bean't likely to be back here again till winter-tide.'

The man passed on, and left Kate standing cold, trembling, and speechless.

As Kate Christianson returned towards the Fen Farm, faint and despairing,—for she felt now that Richard had abandoned her for ever, and that there was no hope for her in this world,—she saw before her the figure of a man.

He was walking slowly towards the farm, on the road which led to the sea;

and though he was too far from her to be distinctly recognised, she knew that he was a stranger. Now and then he paused and looked around him, with the perplexed air of one to whom the surrounding scene was unfamiliar.

Not wishing to come face to face with any person, she held back upon the road, suffering him to pass on out of sight. Listlessly and sadly she wandered down to the mere side, and looked at the dark water wearily, as she had looked upon it that black night before her child was born. Very still and peaceful it looked, in the grey light of the windless, sunless day. Over the shore where she stood several sea-gulls were flying and uttering shrill cries. She stood listening in a dream.

Presently she turned from the water side and walked towards the farm. As she did so, she saw approaching her, with

rapid strides, the same man she had previously seen before her on the road.

It was impossible to avoid him now; so she pushed on past him, averting her face as she came near.

As she came up, he looked at her keenly, and made a sign of recognition; but she noted nothing of this, and was passing rapidly by, when his voice arrested her:

‘Stop, mistress!’

She turned trembling, and looked at him. He was a middle-aged countrified fellow, dressed like a small farmer, in coat and knee-breeches; and his feet and legs were dirty, as if with a long tramp on the highway.

‘Don’t ’ee know me, mistress?’ he continued, with a forbidding smile. ‘Well, some folk ha’ short memories. But I know *thee*, and by the same token I ha’

found thee. My name's Joe Prittlewell, and I come fro' Harringford, where thy poor ba'rn was born.'

Poor Kate uttered a terrified cry, and clutched him by the arm.

'O speak low! speak low! If they should hear!'

'Nay,' said the man sternly, 'it be too late to speak low now, for the mischief's out. I ha' spoken wi' thy mother and wi' thy brother, up yonder at the farm.'

'You have not told them! No, no!'

'Bide a bit, and listen. When you did slip away from my dame's care, with ne'er so much as a "Thank you, dame," or a parting gift, we was sore puzzled, and angry enou' at thy ingratitude; for there was all thy keep to pay for, and the lying-in, and the buryin' beside, for the parish would not help us a groat. "Never mind, dame," says I: "I'll soon



find the wench's friends, an' I had only a bit of a clue." Well, searching in thy chamber, I finds a ring, a leetle gold keepsake ring, and inside that ring was printed thy mother's name. So we worked it out together, my dame and I; and I vowed the first free day I had to come along and speak wi' thy folk; and so I come.'

Dazed and terrified beyond measure, Kate looked at the man, scarcely hearing the words that he spoke. Her secret was out then, once and for ever; and by that time, perchance, her mother's door was already closed against her.

'Did you say you had spoken with my mother?' she cried at last.

'Ay, marry; and ha' given her back her gold ring.'

'And you told her—nay, nay, you did not tell her—you would not be so cruel—you—'

'I told the dame o' thy lying-in at our house, and of the buryin', and that we were poor folk, and could not stand to lose thy keep and thy lodging. Then thy good brother gave me four silver crowns, and pushed me fro' the door. "Keep this all to thyself," says he, "and one day soon I'll ride o'er and talk wi' the dame at home." "Nay, never fear," says I, "I can keep my mouth shut;" and I comed away.'

Kate stood moaning and wringing her hands; then, with a sudden impulse, she turned, and began walking rapidly away from the farm.

The man kept at her side.

'Don't 'ee take on so, my poor wench,' he said gruffly. 'Thou'rt not the first nor the last as has made a fool o' thysen' wi' no help fro' parson; bless 'ee, they thinks no more o' that in *our* good town

than they does up in Lunnon. Thy folk will forgive thee, never fear!’

‘Never, never!’ cried Kate.

‘Who’s thy ba’rn’s feyther, tell me that! Won’t he stand by thee? He will, if it be true, as I ha’ heerd, he be a gentleman born.’

Kate started, with a wild glance at the man.

‘Who told thee he was a gentleman?’ she asked.

‘No man, mistress; but my good dame did gather it fro’ thy wild talk, when thou wast lying-in. Nay, I can tell thee thy gallant’s name—’twas “Richard,” “Richard,” ever on thy tongue; and there were another name, too, a long name, beginning with a round “O”; and I knows who owns it, though I be a stranger hereabout.’

As the man spoke, Kate heard foot-

steps behind her, and turning quickly, she saw her brother running rapidly. Directly her eyes fell upon his face she saw that he knew, or guessed, everything. His eyes looked terrible, and his teeth were set together.

As he came up panting, she shrank back, and lifted up her hands, as if expecting a blow.

‘Christian!’ she cried imploringly. ‘Brother dear!’

‘Nay,’ answered Christian, in a low voice, ‘you have no brother now. You have chosen between us and shame, and we have done with you for ever. I come to you from my mother—to tell you never to darken her door again.’

Kate answered with a moan, hanging her head in hopeless acquiescence.

‘God knows our lot was heavy enough,’ proceeded Christian. ‘God

They stood on the road watching his figure until it disappeared. Then the man turned to Kate, who was sobbing bitterly, and said,

‘Take comfort, wench. Thy folk will forgive thee sure enow, an you gi’e them time; for after all, ’twas human nature. Come home along o’ me.’

Sad and sick at heart, Christian returned homeward. The events of that morning had come like a thunderclap, leaving him no time to think or plan. Had he yielded to his own natural impulse, he would have led his penitent sister back, for he loved her dearly; but all pity, all compunction, all natural affection, was crushed beneath the terrible, unbearable weight of one thought—that his sister’s betrayer was Richard Orchardson.

It was almost too much to bear. By

what cruel fatality could it be that the Orchardsons were destined, at every important turn of his days, to shadow and blacken his being? First, there were the old traditional wrongs, bred in the wild past and abiding in the blood; then, there was his father's death, caused, directly or indirectly, by an Orchardson; again, the family ruin and his mother's despair; and last of all, horrible beyond measure, and in all humanity unbearable, this betrayal of his too foolish, feeble, and loving sister. Yes, the cup was indeed full to overflowing, and all his soul now was set on some desperate revenge.

To add to his mad misery, he knew that Richard Orchardson was just then far beyond his reach, pouring his poisoned words, possibly, into the pure ears of Priscilla Sefton. This last thought was wildest of all. Unable to bear its horrible

suggestions, he hurried across the marsh, and approached the Fen Farm.

The hall door stood wide open, and the house was quite silent. He entered quickly, and passing into the sitting-room, saw his mother sitting quietly there, in her old attitude, the Bible by her side.

‘Well, mother, I have seen her,’ he cried, entering the room, ‘and, alas! she hath confessed.’

There was no reply. The widow sat nerveless in her chair, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, and one outstretched hand on the open Bible. The faint light came through the heavily-curtained window, and touched her pale face and snow-white hair.

Christian approached quickly, stooped down before her, and uttered a terrified cry.

She was dead in her chair.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE DEAD WOMAN.

So Christian fell at once into that great blackness where the atheist lies, with eyes averted from heaven and his forehead pressed into the hard earth. By no intellectual process, by no succession of bitter doubts and ruthless syllogism, but simply through the utterness of moral despair, there was forced upon his soul the consciousness that the world is without God, and that those who doubted God's very existence were in the right. If there were a God indeed, if the gentle Providence of the preacher were a fact or a possibility, such things could never have



been ; that at least seemed clear. Or if God existed, he must be on the side of evil ; cruel, pitiless, incomprehensible, un-blessing and unblest. All was blind fate ; anarchy subsisting in the very shadow of death.

Feeling this, in all the tumult of his wild grief, he sat and looked in the eyes of the dead woman, not yet closed reverently, but fixed in horrible contemplation of some sight of terror which only dead eyes see ; sat and gazed into her eyes and held her clay-cold hand till his own fingers felt like ice, and the chill of the grave was in his heart. Hours passed thus. Night and death were in the house, with no sound, no stir.

At last he rose, lifted the lamp, and held it close to his mother's marble face. Ah ! what a record of hate and pain was written there ! The face was fixed in

pallor, the eyes were blank, but the weary lines and furrows still remained, and the brows were knitted, and the poor thin hair, parted neatly over the blue-veined temples, kept its snow.

‘Mother! mother!’ he moaned; but no tears came.

Then his eye fell upon the old Bible, still standing open by the corpse’s side.

With trembling hand he took it up, and turning to the flyleaf, read his father’s name writ there, and his mother’s name, and poor Kate’s, and last his own; all their names, and the date of his father’s and mother’s wedding, and the birthdays of the children, himself and the poor sister whom sorrow had untimely tried. Of all that little household only one now remained—alone in all the world. The rest had faded from him, like dreams that had scarcely been.

His mind went back to the beginning of it all; to the dark feuds between the two houses, begun in blood before he came.

He saw before him, as in a vision, the Orchardsons and Christiansons of tradition, flitting to and fro amid the shadows of civil war and political change, armed, angry, always with their hands against each other. He remembered how one wild deed had avenged another, how blow had met blow, how hate had met hate, until the men of both houses were more like devils than human beings. Then he bethought him of his father's death-bed, and the black knavery, for so it seemed, which had hastened the poor man's end; of the hour when, as a boy, he struck his enemy's son, and saw him bleeding at his feet; of the lawsuit which followed, and beggared the household

already poor. Last and saddest of all came the thought of his sister's shame and his old mother's broken heart ; these, too, due to an Orchardson, the wickedest of the race.

Amidst these confused images and memories, one form moved like a celestial vision. At every confused vista of his mad recollection there came up before him the image of Priscilla Sefton, with a look of beautiful admonition. She, too, had vanished from him ; she who might have made amends for all, and turned his desolation into some abiding peace. Ah ! what would he not have given just then if she could have suddenly appeared before him to touch the rock of his hate with the wand of her Divine compassion, and strike its stone to tears !

As he thought and thought, the silence became too much for him to bear, and

passing from his mother's side, he went to the hall door and threw it open.

It was a fine moonlight night of high wind; white clouds were scudding over the moon's face; and the air was full of luminous phosphorescence. The fields and marshes lay so distinct before him, that he could trace the black lines of the ditches and hedges, and the patches of wood, as clearly as if it had been day. The wind was coming from seaward, and, listening intently, he could hear a sound which seemed like the moaning of the sea.

Leaving the door open behind him, he passed out, and hastened across the fields to a neighbouring cottage, where dwelt an aged couple who often did rough work about the farm. He knocked loudly, and the door was opened immediately by an old woman.

‘My mother is dead,’ he cried quickly. ‘Haste to the house and watch by her till I return. I am going up to the village.’

The woman uttered a wail ; but before she could assail him with any questions, he was gone.

A strange and sudden thought came over him, and with the fury of a man possessed by a demon, he rushed across the moonlit fields. In a very short time he reached the village ; but he did not stop there. Hastening on, he entered the long avenue leading to the Willows, gained the terrace, and pausing there, stood for some minutes panting for breath.

The great house was in darkness ; but at last he discovered light in one window, a window opening to the ground. Without hesitating a moment, for his wild thought still possessed him, he pushed the window open, and entered. There

was a startled cry, a tall figure sprung up, and he found himself standing face to face with Squire Orchardson.

‘Help!’ cried the squire in terror.  
‘Who’s there?’

‘It is I, Christian Christianson.’

His voice was clear and distinct as he replied, and but for his death-white face and close-set lips, he would have seemed free of all agitation. Years after that night he remembered his coolness and self-command, and wondered at them. He looked steadily in the squire’s face and waited.

For a time the old man seemed overpowered by surprise, glanced nervously towards the bell-rope and at the door.

‘What seek you here?’ he said at last.  
‘At this hour——’

‘I have come to speak with your son.’

‘My son is far away,’ answered the

squire quickly. 'What do you want with him?'

'Nay,' said Christian, 'the father will do as well. I have come to you from—from my mother.'

His voice faltered a little at the name, but his eye still looked calmly in the other's face.

'Your mother wishes to see *me*?' cried Orchardson in complete astonishment.

Christian answered with a curious inclination of the head.

'If this is indeed so,' said the squire nervously, 'if your mother has any word to say to me that may calm ill blood, God forbid that I should thwart her. I have heard of her trouble, not without compassion. Tell her I will come to her to-morrow.'

'No, to-night! to-night!' cried Chris-



tian in the same low voice ; and he made a step as if to place his hand upon the old man's arm.

‘To-night? Impossible!’

‘I tell you I have come to you from her. Will you follow me? or are you afraid?’

The old man drew himself up with a nervous shrug of the shoulders.

‘Nay, I am not frightened so easily ; and, indeed, what should I fear? But the request is so sudden, so unreasonable.’

‘Come and see her,’ persisted Christian, ‘that is all I ask.’

‘Nay, if the dame is ill——’

‘Ay, sick unto death,’ was the answer. ‘She is waiting for you ; come!’

The squire looked at his visitor again, and then, after a moment's hesitation, concluded to obey the strange summons. It did not seem altogether extraordinary that

Dame Christianson, being possibly at the point of death, might have some last request to make, or some final confession. With all his faults, and they were numerous, Orchardson had his human feelings; and he would have been rather relieved than otherwise at a death-bed reconciliation with the woman who had suffered so much from his animosity.

‘Wait here a moment,’ he said; ‘I will go with you.’

So saying, he withdrew from the room; in a few minutes he returned, cloaked, and staff in hand.

Could he have seen the strangely ominous smile which crossed Christian’s face as they passed out into the night, he would doubtless have hesitated before leaving his own door.

Even as it was, he kept the young man well before him as they went, and

held his hand underneath his cloak, gripping a weapon. For he, better than most men, knew the stuff of which his hereditary adversaries were made, and which rendered them capable of almost any deed of violence.

Christian led the way so rapidly that the old man had some difficulty in keeping up with him. Once or twice the latter paused for breath, or to put further questions, to all of which Christian answered in monosyllables. They passed through the slumbering village, along the brink of the mere, and at last they came in sight of the Fen Farm.

Not far from the door, Orchardson again paused.

‘If your mother is very sick,’ he said, ‘would it not be better to seek holy aid? I should be glad to see some man of God by her bedside.’

Without replying, Christian strode on to the farm door, pointed his companion in, and followed. But the room where he had left his mother lying was empty, and the chair was vacant. He turned and led the way upstairs. On the landing above he encountered the old man and woman his neighbours, and spoke to them in a whisper. Then he pushed open a bedroom door, and entered; Orchardson followed close behind.

The room was dimly lit by an oil lamp, and on the bed, stretched out in white, lay the corpse of Dame Christianson, stiff and cold.

At sight of the bed and its ghastly occupant, the squire recoiled and uttered a cry. In a moment Christian's powerful hand clutched his arm like a vice.

'Look!' said Christian.

'Merciful heaven! she is dead!'

‘Yes, she is dead. I have brought you here to look upon your work; yours, and your son’s. You killed her. You killed my father first, then her. Nay, you shall not stir.’

Pale as death, and trembling violently, Orchardson tried to shake himself free and leave the room.

‘She died to-night,’ said Christian, ‘before I came to you; and she died cursing you. You did not hear her curse, but you shall hear mine. But first, *where* is Richard your son? Tell me where he is, that I may follow him, and avenge my mother and sister.’

‘What do you mean? You talk like a madman. Let me leave this place.’

‘Not till you tell me where to find your son.’

‘He is far away.’

‘Where?’

‘I do not know. Release your hold, young man. You are profaning your mother’s death-chamber.’

He had struck the right note at last. With a wild look at the dead figure on the bed, and a half-smothered sob, Christian led the old man from the room, and downstairs into the hall; thence into the gloomy chamber, still lighted by a lamp, where his mother had died.

By this time Mr. Orchardson had recovered his self-command. Looking keenly at Christian, and throwing into his manner a certain sympathy of superiority, he said with decision,

‘You have brought me here on a fool’s errand, but I am sorry for you. God knows I never wished any ill to your mother. I would have been lenient to you all, had you not driven me to desperation. Well, what more have you to say to me?’

‘Only this,’ answered Christian: ‘if you were not an old man, you should not leave this house to-night alive. But you may go. My reckoning shall be with your son.’

Mr. Orchardson walked towards the door; then, as if impelled by a sudden thought, he turned quickly, and fixed his keen eyes on Christian’s face.

‘My son hath no reason to love you,’ he said, quietly; ‘but what evil hath he done you, that you should hate him so?’

Christian did not reply, but met the old man’s eye with a look of terrible meaning.

‘My son is a gentleman,’ continued Mr. Orchardson. ‘If you are thinking of the lying tales concerning him and your unhappy sister, let me tell you that he is innocent in that matter; nay, I have it from his own lips that he is innocent.’

And even were he guilty as you believe, 'tis but a boy's folly, and he would make amends.'

With the swiftness and ferocity of a wild animal, Christian crossed the room towards Mr. Orchardson, who shrank back as if apprehending personal violence. But though his clenched hands were raised trembling in the air, he struck no blow.

'Your son hath betrayed my sister, and killed my mother, who lieth yonder. No matter where he is hiding, I shall find him. No matter how long I may have to wait, I shall kill him ; and I should kill *you* this night for the wrong you did my father, if I did not wish you to live to see my vengeance on your son—to see him lying dead before you, killed by my hand.'

The old man shrank back in horror,



less at the words than at the expression on the speaker's face.

'Wretch!' he gasped, 'I will swear the peace against you. The law——'

'No law will save your son from me. It will be life for life, and may God's curse blind me if I do not as I have sworn. Now begone!'

Christian pointed to the door. With an exclamation, half-angry, half-fearful, Mr. Orchardson shrank away before the outstretched hand, and tottered out into the night, closing the hall door with a crash behind him. Reaching the gate beyond, he paused a moment, and saw the dim light coming from the upper chamber where the woman was lying dead. Then shocked and shaken by what he had heard and seen, he made his way slowly back to the Willows.

Left to himself in the lower room,

Christian fell into a chair, and hid his face in his hands. For nearly an hour he remained thus, a prey to his own wild thoughts; then he rose and walked back to the death-chamber, and knelt down by his mother's side.

Early the next morning, after a night of little sleep, Mr. Orchardson rose, and sitting down to his desk, wrote a long letter to his son. The letter contained much general matter; among it all, these warning words:—

‘All this is as I have told you. As you love me, keep away from the Willows yet awhile; for the fool is dangerous, and you can scarce guess the hate which breedeth in his simple heart. He layeth his sister's flight and his mother's death at our door. Look to yourself, my dear Dick, should you meet; but nay, you must not meet.

And so, with many fond wishes that your suit may thrive, farewell.'

To make all safe and sure, Mr. Orchardson himself rode over to the neighbouring town with the letter containing the above warning, and sent it by coach with his own hand.

The next few days were a dreary blank to Christian Christianson. Like one in a dream he heard folk coming and going; saw the wooden coffin borne in at the door; went up afterwards and saw the waxen face lying at peace within it; sat for hours in the solemn room; finally, one sad day, heard the bell tolling, as he followed the hand-bearers with their black burthen up the hillside, through the village, to the green churchyard.

In a dream still, he stood in his black cloak, bareheaded, by the open grave, and

heard the loose mould drip heavily on the coffin wood. 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.' But no sweet pity, no thought of Divine resurrection, filled his soul. All his thoughts were turned one way—how to avenge his mother, how to set right his sister's wrong by some sudden and desperate deed. Then he too might die—the sooner the better.

His plans were all matured. To remain longer in the place of his birth was poison to him. He had an idea that all avoided him, that the story of his sister's disgrace and the family dishonour turned every heart against him; whereas, if the truth must be told, his own sullen suspicion and gloomy reticence were the causes which prevented the neighbours from volunteering help or sympathy. He hated

the place, the familiar faces, the common air and sunshine. He would go away, never perhaps to return.

Meantime, while preparing to depart, he inquired high and low, secretly but persistently, the whereabouts of Richard Orchardson; but no one could help him. Some said that the young man was upon the Continent; others that he was somewhere in the great city of London. Nor could he gain any tidings whatever of Priscilla and her father; they too had vanished, without leaving any trace.

In those days, when the daily newspaper was not thought of, and when the electric telegraph was not even a dream, folk had not to wander far away if they wished to leave their old lives entirely behind them. Fifty miles was as far away, to all intents and purposes, as five times fifty is now. Tidings of those he sought

were not likely to be brought to Christian's ears. If he wished to find them, he must follow them out into the world, and trace them step by step.

This indeed he resolved to do, being too fiercely impatient to wait until his enemy might return home. He scarcely knew his own heart yet—it was so clouded and tortured by passion; but in reality it was possessed by two spirits—one of hate and the other of love. Come what might, he had resolved to avenge the family, and to have it out with Richard Orchardson, even to the death; but he was no less firmly bent on finding Priscilla Sefton, the only vision of beauty and goodness he had ever had on this dark earth.

## CHAPTER V.

## ON BOARD THE 'MILES STANDISH.'

IN the autumn of the year of which we are writing, there lay in the harbour basin of Southampton the good ship *Miles Standish*, a barque of eight hundred tons burden, laden with goods for the American market, and having, moreover, accommodation for several cabin passengers, besides a large party of emigrants bound to New England. The skipper, Ezekiel Moses Higginbotham, of Salem, Massachusetts, was a shrewd New Englander, of pious bearings; and it was with no small satisfaction that he reflected that the emigrant party under his care were for the most

part religiously disposed agricultural labourers and farm servants, destined to join a settlement of hard-working Moravians far in the heart of the colony.

It was the evening before the day fixed for the sailing of the vessel, and the sun was just setting in golden splendour, after a day of unusual brightness and magnificence. Under an awning stretched from stern rail to companion of the vessel, sat two figures—one a tall grey-headed man dressed somewhat like a clergyman, the other a girl in pensive black. They were the Wesleyan preacher, Richard Sefton, and Priscilla his daughter.

As they sat in the shadow, the old man looking down, the girl gazing with hopeful eyes on the sunlit light that covered the sparkling water, the numerous shipping, and the rose-tinted town, there came from the fore part of the ship the



‘ And, God willing, I will sail in your company, as you once besought me to do.’

Priscilla looked at him in astonishment. More than once, indeed, when they had first discussed their plans for accompanying the little colony to the States, it had been hinted, more in jest than earnest, that young Orchardson’s help and company would be welcome ; but Priscilla herself had never seriously thought of the possibility. She knew the young man’s love for her, yet never calculated that it might lead him so great a length. Not entirely with pleasure now did she look into his eager face.

But Mr. Sefton reached out both hands, and took those of Richard warmly. The young man knew his foibles, and had humoured them so well that he was a prime favourite.

‘ You are welcome,’ he said, ‘ and I

think you have decided wisely. But what saith your worthy father ?'

'He hath given me free leave to roam for a year,' replied Richard. 'If you can show me how to help the good cause, how to make myself helpful to the poor folk under your care, I shall be heartily glad; for, indeed, I am sick of an idle life, and would fain be of some use in the world.'

Mr. Sefton nodded approvingly; and it was soon settled, by a reference to the skipper, who stood looking on phlegmatically, that Richard should take passage in the *Miles Standish*. So the seamen hoisted up his luggage from the boat, which still floated alongside, and descending to the skipper's private cabin, he paid his passage-money and received an acknowledgment in writing about as legible as a cuneiform inscription.

Returning to the deck, Richard found

Priscilla leaning over the vessel's side, and looking shoreward. Her face was shadowed, and she scarcely turned her eyes towards him as he approached.

'Are you angry that I came?' he asked in a low voice.

'Why should I be angry?'

'I had thought you might be pleased. For mine own part, I could not dwell content in the land when you were gone.'

She turned her face to his, with a searching look.

'You are not frank with my father,' she said. 'You make him believe that you would serve God, and good Master Wesley's cause, but you care for neither.'

He answered, with a peculiar smile, 'Sweetheart, I care for both—for your dear sake.'

She stamped her little foot upon the deck, in positive anger.

'Go back to your father,' she cried; 'your place is with him, and with your English kinsmen. Why should you follow us? We shall never perchance return to England, and you only waste your time. It is I whom you follow, not my father; and I shall be better content if you do not come.'

So she spoke, with cheek half averted from him; and never had she looked more winsome and fair. The dying light of day lingered upon her cheek and on her hair, while Richard, with dark eyes fixed upon her, leaned upon the bulwark, smiling to himself at her petulance, and feeling certain that it would soon pass away.

There was a pause. Finding she did not speak again, he said quietly,

'If it be a sin to forsake father, country, kinsmen, for the sake of one dearer than all, then in sooth I am to

blame. To be near you, Priscilla, I would wander to the world's end. But do not think that I will fret you with my society. Unless you wish it, I will never come near your presence. I shall be content to sail in the same ship, under the same sky, with one so dear ; and if God should so will it, —which God Himself forbid!—to sink with you to the same deep rest.'

Priscilla trembled as she listened. Could it be Richard Orchardson who was speaking? The words seemed so unlike any she had heard from him,—more earnest, solemn, and truthful, less flippant and self-confident. Had Christian Christianson been the speaker, she could have understood ; for he had often used such language, or language as deeply earnest. But, indeed, Richard Orchardson was for the time in earnest too. Had she known more of the world, she would have been

aware that even light men have their solemn moods ; and that, given time, place, and occasion, even a hypocrite or a self-lover may be honestly and unselfishly moved. Just then, Richard Orchardson, despite his characteristic self-pride and heartlessness, felt indeed a lover, who had sacrificed the world for his mistress' sake, and was ready to follow her in all the chivalry of fearless manhood. The girl's beautiful presence, the dreamy scene, the deepening twilight, the soft voices of the sea, had all their temporary spell upon him. It is idle to think that such things have witchery for only good men ; they influence the bad and ignoble also ; nay, even brute beasts feel them, blindly feeling upward to speech and soul.

What could Priscilla say ? She could scarcely blame the man for loving her so much ; and there was something in his

devotion which touched her heart. She made one last appeal to him not to leave England. 'Ask anything but that,' he said; and she yielded perforce, frankly telling him, however, that if he hoped to win her love, he hoped in vain.

'Because you love another,' he cried eagerly, thinking of his enemy.

'Because I love no man,' she answered simply; and with that answer his vanity was quite content.

The Seftons, we may explain at this point, were not leaving England with the view of never returning. They were simply accompanying the emigrants, who were mainly Moravian converts, to the colony, to examine the ground there, and see how much more good might be done by sending out further emigrants in the future. It was a scheme in which the great

Mr. Wesley was himself interested ; and Mr. Sefton had contributed largely to the necessary funds. So the blind man and his daughter were sent, in a quasi-official way, to be the shepherd and shepherdess of the outgoing flock ; and then, when the work was done, to return for similar work elsewhere.

That evening, the skipper of the *Miles Standish* rowed ashore, and, accompanied by his chief mate, a little hard-grained Yankee, began beating the slums of Southampton, in the hope of making up his crew. But good men were scarce, and even bad ones were not to be had for the mere asking.

'I reckon we shall have to sail short-handed after all,' cried Captain Higginbotham, scratching his head.

He was standing at the door of a dingy



public-house on the waterside, surveyed at a respectful distance by divers landsharks and waterside characters, who took no little delight in his dilemma. In company with his mate, he had beaten up every possible lodging-house and drinking den in the town, without any definite result whatever.

As he spoke, there stood before him a tall muscular figure, dressed in a slop seaman's suit, very like those which were dangling for sale over the doors of nearly all the low outfitting shops in the town. On his head he wore a rough seaman's-cap, round his throat a rough muffler was loosely thrown. He had a loose shambling gait, characteristic of the waterside loafer, and when he spoke, he shuffled with his feet, and looked upon the ground.

'Waal, where do *you* hail from?' growled the skipper, looking at him contemptuously.

'I've heard as how you're short-handed,' said the man, with a strong country accent, 'and I thought——'

'Waal, what might *you* happen to think?' asked the captain.

'I thought as how *I* might serve.'

The captain surveyed the speaker leisurely, beginning with his feet, and lifting his gaze slowly, inch by inch, till it met a pair of deep-set eyes, intensely bright and keen. Then he shook his head.

'Don't try it on with *me*, stranger,' he said. '*You* won't suit.'

'Why?'

'Cause *I* guess you're no more a salt-water sailor than that their pump-handle.'

'How do you know that?' asked the man, with the ghost of a smile on his cheek.

'By the voice of you, by the rigs of you, and by the cut of your precious jib. Let's feel of your hands! Their! Call

that a sailor's paw! Why, you're a land-lubber, and never smelt green water.'

'And if so be I am,' persisted the man, 'why shouldn't I smell it now? Lookee, skipper! I'm strong and I'm young, I can row and sail a boat, and I'm willing to work my way out for my keep, if so be you'll take me.'

The skipper was about to give another grim negative, when the mate caught him by the sleeve and whispered in his ear. The two talked in a low voice together for some minutes, then the captain turned sharply to the volunteer, and fixed him with his one eye.

'You mean it, stranger?'

'Yes, I want to get out to the colony.'

'Wheer might you be raised, and what's your name?'

'I was born and christened in Essex county, and my name——' here the man

hesitated a moment, but continued boldly, 'my name's John Dyson.'

'We sail to-morrow morning, first tide.'

'Soon as you like, skipper.'

'Then I'm your man, John Dyson. I'll hev you, and chaw my head off if I don't make a sailor on you, somehow. Dew you say done?'

'Done.'

'Done it is,' said the captain, and held out his horny hand.

Late that evening, when the town was asleep, the captain, well-primed with liquor and tolerably well contented, entered his gig, followed by the new seaman, carrying a small canvas bag of necessaries. As they rowed out through the dark basin, with its twinkling lights, the stranger volunteered a question.

'Skipper?'

‘Waal?’

‘I’ve heerd there’s a blind man aboard your ship,—a blind man and his daughter.’

‘And if there is, you lubber, what then?’

‘Nought; it is no affair of mine, only I thought——’

‘Hold your jaw,’ growled the captain. ‘Guess we don’t ship you to think, but to pull ropes. Never you mind my passengers; your job’s afore the mast, and you’ll hev to look alive aboard any ship of mine.’

A few minutes afterwards the new hand stepped on board, and was roughly ordered off to the fore-castle.

As he stood on the fore part of the vessel alone in the darkness, his manner changed, and casting off for the moment his awkward attitude, he stood erect and listened; while from the distant cabin

there came the sound of a woman's voice singing.

'I was right after all,' he muttered to himself; 'she is here—he hath followed her: I have only to watch and wait.'

## CHAPTER VI. .

## OUTWARD BOUND.

EARLY the next day, the good ship *Miles Standish*, with free sheets and all sail set, was slipping with a fair wind down the English Channel, with her bowsprit pointing almost due westward, and the low-lying shores of England lying dark and dim on the starboard side. The breeze was light, yet firm, the smooth billows just darkened by a pleasant ripple, the skies overhead blue and light, and the air sunny.

She was not a brilliant sailer, the *Miles Standish*, and was without splendid accomplishments or beauty of any kind ; but she

did her work in a sober, settled, business-like fashion, that showed she could be depended upon in all kinds of weather. Though she was well laden, she carried her cargo easily, and there, in the open ocean highway, where vessels of all sorts and sizes were going and coming, she held her own, running with many clippers of her own tonnage, and would have proved a laggard only in the event of a long beat to windward.

Priscilla Sefton stood on deck, and looked with pleased eyes on the radiant scene around her: ponderous merchantmen, beating clumsily homeward towards the silvery mouth of the Thames; fishing-boats and coasting cutters, darting to and fro like happy wildfowl; here and there a snowy-sailed gunboat or formidable man-of-war's man, with closed portholes like clenched teeth; and sail of all degrees



and sizes, running with the *Miles Standish* along the smooth watery highway to the west. It was her first real experience of the beauties of the sea; for though she had more than once crossed the narrow Channel in a sailing packet, it had generally been at night, or in such weather as made clear-headed observation impracticable, not to say impossible. So she was like a happy child. She had no such tender ties in England as could make her sad or homesick, and if she thought now of Christian Christianson, it was as of a pleasant friend, whom she might or might not meet again, but whose life in any case was complete without any new contact with her own.

Alas! how little did she know that the blind Sisters were weaving their tangled thread to confuse her pretty dreams and plans! How little did she guess that on

board that very ship were lurking the two elements of love and hate, by which her fate was destined to be determined for joy or sorrow !

‘Are you sorry to leave England?’ asked Richard Orchardson, coming near her as she leant over the bulwarks and looked landward. ‘For my part, I should not care if it sank for ever beneath the sea, so that I had the green water to look on, this good ship to sail in, and you to keep me company till the end of time.’

‘And your father?’ said Priscilla, smiling. ‘You forget that he abides in the land and would sink with it.’

‘Heaven forbid!’ cried Richard quickly. ‘I did indeed forget the dear old man ! But as for dreary England, for the place where I was born, never did I hate it so much as now.’

‘And I *love* it!’ returned Priscilla, looking with dreamy eyes at the faint line of the English shore. ‘I love England, and English folk. I should not like to die afar. I think my ghost would rise, and speed across the seas to the dear old land.’

‘Nay, but all lands are alike, when those we hold dear are with us.’

‘I do not think that,’ answered Priscilla simply, not heeding the tender tone or noting the warm look with which the words had been accompanied. ‘A good man loves his dear ones first, and then his home, how poor soever it be, and then his country; and he who loves the last best, doth often love the others most.’

Richard flushed nervously, for something in the little speech sounded like a reproach. In Priscilla’s presence, deeply

as he enjoyed its charm, he was never quite free from the irritation a somewhat ignoble disposition must ever experience beneath the spell of an ingenuous nature. This irritation, instead of generating a noble shame, vented itself in the dark workings of the strong personal passion which filled the young man's soul.

That day passed, and when night came, the weather was still exquisitely calm. The shores of England had faded away into the sea, leaving in their stead, on the dark sea-line, clusters of splendid stars; and all around, and overhead, the arches of heaven were hung with luminous lamps, and in the west the moon was large and round as a shield, strewing the glassy swell with palpitating beams.

Richard Orchardson had chosen his opportunity well. By joining Priscilla on board ship, by becoming of necessity her

constant companion and fellow-passenger, he was likely to find ample means of reaching her heart. And now, on this first night of the voyage, when the very breaking of the sea seemed full of unsatisfied yearning, and the glowing heavens bright with love, Priscilla and he were again alone together. If with the very elements as accomplices he could not gain her sympathetic attention, then surely his suit was hopeless.

Hopeless indeed it seemed. Directly he touched upon the theme of love, Priscilla drew her hand away from his (he had taken it in the fervour of some fond protesting speech) and said, 'Good-night.'

'Good-night!' he repeated.

'Yes; now you begin again to talk foolishly, I will not stay. I was right, after all. You would have done better to have remained in England.'

‘Nay, but hearken!’

‘You have broken your promise.’

‘How?’

‘Not to fret me with speaking as no other man hath dared to speak. Well, I was right. You had better have remained at home.’

So saying, she left him and went below.

Scarcely had she left the deck, when a figure flitted past Richard’s side, and disappeared in the direction of the fore-castle.

The green hand, John Dyson, found himself among a rough lot forward. The fore-castle itself was a foul, ill-smelling hole, dark as a tomb, and impure as a charnel-house, and its occupants were for the most part old sea-dogs, with scarcely an idea in the world beyond seamanship and rum.

At first these choice spirits seemed to resent the intrusion of a green hand among them, evincing their humour by a series of jokes more practical than profound, and in every way the reverse of delicate. On discovering, however, that John Dyson, though a quiet, retiring person, was inclined to resent such liberties, or to retaliate in the same humorous spirit by knocking one or two of the jokers' heads together, the choice spirits thought better of it. They perceived that John Dyson was a very harmless shipmate if let alone, but that he was very far from harmless when strangers encroached too far. In point of physical strength, he was a match for any two men in the ship; in point of determination and courage he was equal in an emergency to the whole crew.

His work lay before the mast, and he

seemed to prefer that it should be there. Naturally quick and energetic, he was soon able to hold his own with the other seamen, and his great physical strength gave him an additional advantage. So that the worthy captain and his mate were not long before they congratulated each other on having shipped John Dyson.

One peculiarity of the new hand they could not fail to remark ; he was careless to indifference of his life, and whenever there was any dangerous duty to be performed below, or aloft, he was the first to undertake it.

Four days after the ship left port, she was tossing in an ocean black as ink, and there was heard on every side the ominous sound of rising wind and water. An order was given to double reef topsails, and among those who ran up the rigging like wild cats, John Dyson was foremost.



As he hung out on the extreme edge of the fore-topmast yard, with the sail belching and bellowing and thundering around him, and the wild canvas struggling like a living thing in the clutch of his hand, he saw far below him on the deck the form of Priscilla Sefton, standing near to the companion. The vessel gave a great lurch, and he saw her stagger on the deck, but before she could fall or leave her place, Richard Orchardson had sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

The next minute there was a loud cry forward, 'A man overboard!'

John Dyson heard the cry, as the wild water, with a thunderous roar, surged up around him, stunned him, and sucked him down. In the eagerness of his gaze downward, he had relaxed his hold and fallen—prone into the sea.

For a moment he seemed to lose con-

sciousness. Then he found himself struggling and choking on the summit of a great wave, looking after the ship, which seemed to stand stationary like a cloud, while he was swept away before the waves.

He heard the cry—he saw the faces clustering at the side; among them he recognised, or seemed to recognise, her face, white and fearful; then he sank down into the trough of the sea, and saw nothing but flying foam and roaring water.

Fortunately, he was a strong swimmer. Instinctively he struck out for life. Rising like a cork on the crest of the next wave, he saw the schooner's sails telling out before the wind, and saw her sweeping round. Then the waters sucked him down into the trough again, and he was washed on.

Strangely enough, his head was quite clear. He felt his danger, but was more or less indifferent to it, though the mere instinct of self-preservation made him use what skill he possessed in keeping afloat.

Presently, after he had almost given up the hope of succour, he saw the schooner bearing down towards him under the lightest of canvas. As she came nearer, passing within a ship's length of him, he saw again the faces thronging against her side. A shout rose in the air—faint and far-off it seemed, like a voice from a mountain-top, and he knew that he was seen.

The vessel sped past, and then, having done so, was brought up to the wind to leeward of him. Every wash of the waters now swept him nearer and nearer to it, but he struck out firmly, and partly impelled

by his own strength, partly driven by the surging waves, swam for life.

The rest seemed darkness and confusion. He heard the waters roaring, saw the vessel looming above him, while human voices sounded faintly from its decks; then, blinded by the salt surge and choking spray, he clutched a rope which was flung to him and over him—and in another minute was drawn on deck, dripping like a rough-coated water-dog.

Priscilla had been an eyewitness of everything, from the moment that the alarm was raised to the moment when the man was drawn back on deck. She had watched the water wildly, scarcely distinguishing the living shape upon it, until, as the rope was thrown, she had caught the glimpse of a wild wave-washed form, a gasping upturned face, and waving

arms. As for the face, it was only dimly perceptible, covered with tangled hair, foam-bespattered, and changed almost beyond recognition.

But when they had drawn the man on board, she would have stepped forward to look at him, and perhaps speak to him, had not Richard interposed.

‘You had better stop here,’ he said, ‘they are a rough lot before the mast.’

‘Nay, but the poor man may need succour yet. If I may not go to him, do you go in my place, and tell him——’

Just at that moment the skipper came aft, after having made his inspection of the rescued man. Priscilla questioned him at once, and received from his own lips the assurance that there was no cause for further alarm.

‘The man’s all right, I calculate,’ said the skipper, phlegmatically. ‘You see he’s

a land-lubber, and I guess it's his first salt-water bath, but he can swim like a fish, and he's none the worse. Don't you fret yourself about *him!*'

So Priscilla did not go forward. Had she done so she would have seen John Dyson standing near the forecastle hatch, wet and bewildered, but otherwise much the same as before he fell into the sea. In one particular only was he changed. The men noted it, whispered about it among themselves, and laughed in a puzzled sort of way.

Before he had fallen into the sea, he had worn a beard. *Now*, curiously enough, no sign of a beard was to be seen.

The sea had washed it away!

It was a noticeable fact that after that day John Dyson grew sullener and stranger than ever. When he came on deck next

morning, his face was strangely disfigured; one of his eyes was terribly blackened, and there was an ugly bruise upon his mouth, obliterating the natural expression entirely.

The mate cocked his eye at him, but made no remark—the marks seemed the natural consequence of the accident; but the men shook their heads, and winked significantly at one another.

Later on in the day the boatswain accosted the mate.

‘Queer customer, this green hand. Have you observed his figurehead?’

The mate nodded, and the boatswain continued:

‘Well, a fall into the sea don’t mark like that. He’s made those marks himself.’

‘What the thunder do you mean?’

‘Wore a false beard when he went overboard, and came back clean shaven.’

Put those cuts and bruises on with his own hand, I guess.'

The mate cogitated for a moment, then gave a hoarse chuckle.

'What d'ye make of it?' he asked.

'Some one wants him, I s'pose, and he's feared o' being known.'

'Well, it's no consarn of ours. We've shipped him, and he does his work like a sailor. But keep your eye on him, for all that.'

That very night, as Captain Higginbotham issued from below, he saw a figure crouching on the deck, and gazing eagerly down through the skylight—into the cabin where Priscilla, her father, and Richard Orchardson were seated at the evening meal.

'Who's there?' cried the skipper.

Without answering the figure began to move towards the fore part of the ship.



‘Who’s there—d’ye hear?’ repeated the skipper, striding forward and gripping the figure by the shoulder. ‘What, John Dyson! What d’ye mean by skulking about aft?’

John Dyson made no reply.

‘Jest you go forward, and mind this—your place is before the mast.’

Still silent, John Dyson glided back to his place among the men, while the captain, with a suspicious shake of the head, watched him disappear.

## CHAPTER VII.

'JOHN DYSON.'

HALF-WAY across the Atlantic, the *Miles Standish* encountered the storm-winds of the autumnal equinox, and for several days and nights captain and crew had all their work before them in keeping the little vessel snug. The small party of Wesleyan emigrants lay sick amidships, Mr. Sefton kept his berth, and Priscilla scarcely left her cabin. During this period, Richard was assiduous in his attentions on both father and daughter.

On the third morning of the storm, Richard went on deck, and found the ship lying-to with just enough canvas set

to keep her steady, on a sea as white as snowdrift, and under skies as black as ink. Dawn was just breaking, with wild wind and rain.

Clinging to the companion, with the spray breaking over him, Richard looked along the decks and saw the watch gathered forward, fresh from taking in more sail. Apart from them stood a powerful figure, clinging to the fore rigging, and looking to windward.

Richard started. He could not see the man's face, but something in the figure seemed curiously familiar. He only knew one man in the world so powerfully fashioned, and that man was Christian Christianson.

The man turned, and their eyes met.

Richard was troubled anew; for the face, save that it was greatly disfigured and distorted, bore a certain resemblance

to that of his old enemy. The eyes especially, with their deep determined light, were strangely like those of Christianson.

After a momentary gaze, the man turned his head away, and looked again at the sea. Richard smiled at his own fears. Doubtless there was a strong physical resemblance between the strange sailor and Christianson; but the latter was in England, safe and far away. He cast another scrutinising look at the wild, rudely-dressed figure, then he turned to the captain, who stood by the man at the wheel.

'Can you tell me that man's name?' he inquired carelessly. 'The tall man with the bruises upon his face?'

'Yes. That's one of our extra hands, John Dyson.'

'An Englishman?'

‘Yes ; and a good sailor he is, though a green hand. Seems to interest you, I guess ?’

Richard glanced forward, and saw that the man, though seemingly occupied at some of the ropes, was still looking stealthily in his direction.

‘He is very like some one I used to know, that’s all.’

‘Waal,’ said the skipper phlegmatically, ‘I calculate he ain’t much good. My mate tells me queer tales about him, and I reckon he must be some gaol-bird that has flown out of the stone cage. But that’s no business of mine ; I shipped him, and he does his work like a man.’

Richard cast another nervous look at the sailor, who still stood in the same position, obviously watchful. Was it possible ? Could it indeed be Christian Christianson, masquerading for some dark

purpose of his own? The idea seemed postposterous, and Richard soon dismissed it. Nevertheless, the resemblance troubled him, and gave rise to a certain watchful uneasiness.

His first strong impulse was to speak to Priscilla, and direct her attention to the person calling himself John Dyson.

On reflection, however, he felt that it might be unwise, for the sake of a very foolish suspicion, to recall to her the memory of one who had been a dangerous rival. For all he knew, that rival was altogether forgotten, and the longer he remained so the more likely was his own passionate suit to thrive.

At last the equinoctial storm abated, and was succeeded, as is so often the case, by an interval of sunny weather. The troubled sea became smooth as glass and

bright as gold, the wind died gradually away, the skies grew cloudless and clear.

Then Priscilla came on deck again, adding sunshine to the sunshine.

No sooner did she do so, than Richard looked for the strange sailor. He was nowhere to be seen.

Nor did Richard fail to remark afterward that whenever Priscilla was on deck John Dyson was invisible. Whether by set design or accident, he invariably happened to be out of the way.

*'Sweet is sunshine after storm.'*

Those were pleasant days, those now spent upon the sea: pleasant, that is, to Priscilla Sefton. She was able to sit constantly on the deck, look at the sparkling blue water, and dream.

Now for the first time her thoughts scanned the past, and tried to unravel the pleasant mystery of the future. It

was the past which troubled her most, however ; it was to those many and stormy episodes in the valley of Brightling-head that her thoughts most persistently returned ; and as she did so the face of Christian Christianson, almost forgotten for a space, constantly flashed before her dreamy eyes.

While she had been with him Priscilla had caught too much of the whirlwind of his passion to be able to analyse her own feelings regarding him—she only knew that for his faults she seemed ever ready to make excuses. Then his strange passion had alarmed her, and she had fled, with a quiet prayer upon her lips, that under brighter and happier circumstances the two might some day meet again. Would that prayer ever be answered ? would it ever again be her lot to stand as she had stood upon the



silent sea-shore—feel his strong hand grasping her own, and hear his voice saying, 'Priscilla, I love you!'

Love her! ah yes, he did love her very much, she was sure of that; and now she acknowledged to herself, what she had never dared acknowledge to him, that his love had been, in a measure, returned.

One night, during the fine weather, a curious circumstance happened, one which for the time completely shattered Priscilla's dream, and made her even more uneasy as to what might be going on far away.

Evening prayer was over, most of the emigrants had retired for the night, when Priscilla, feeling restless and singularly wakeful, went up on deck to enjoy the fresh air and muse for a few minutes alone.

She walked for a time up and down

the deck ; then she paused, and, leaning on the bulwarks, looked down into the sea. The night was well advanced, but she could see the glimmering of the waves, deep down, by the light of the moon and a brilliantly starlit sky.

She stood for a time looking down, then her dreaminess passed away ; she raised her head, and was about to turn and continue her walk, when a shiver ran through her frame, her hand grasped nervously at the woodwork at her side, and her eyes gazed full into the eyes of an apparition !

Standing a few paces away, with his melancholy eyes fixed on hers, his face deathly pale, was Christian Christianson.

Was it dream or reality ? Priscilla could not tell. The shock was so sudden that she completely lost her habitual self-control, and uttered a terrified scream.

The next moment the face and form which the moonlight had revealed to her with such terrible distinctness were nowhere to be seen.

But her scream brought assistance : in a moment she was surrounded with eager inquirers. The captain bent his one eye upon her, and roughly but kindly patted her cold, trembling hand ; Richard Orchardson stood by, eager to offer more substantial comfort : but to none of these would Priscilla give a detailed explanation of what had taken place.

‘Perchance it was only a fancy,’ she said. ‘Methought I saw the spirit of one who is far away. But I will go down to my father, and I will not disturb you with my foolish fancies again.’

The captain, who was inclined to make allowances for the hysterical tendencies of women, accepted this explana-

tion and thought of the matter no more ; but Richard Orchardson was of a more inquiring mind, and consequently was not so easily satisfied. Long after Priscilla had bidden all a sweet good-night, and shut herself in her cabin, he walked the deck trying to unravel the mystery.

In vain ; without Priscilla's aid he could never know what had taken place that night.

All that night, sleep was a stranger to Priscilla Sefton's pillow ; now, more than ever, her thoughts wandered back to the village from which she was flying ; and her brain conjured up the picture of the pale sad face which she had seen so vividly in vision. How very pale and sad it had looked : how reproachfully the eyes had gazed at her. Even now, as she looked and listened, she seemed to hear his voice calling to her across the

sea, and her tender heart was full of self-reproach. 'It was cowardly cruel of me to leave him,' she said; 'if I had stayed, with God's help I might have saved him; but now—nay, the Lord only knows what he may become!'

Though the memory of the strange apparition haunted her, she resolved to speak of it to no one: and for a time she kept her resolve; at length, however, the terror of it—the harassing thoughts of what it might portend, grew so strong upon her, that she felt she could keep silent no longer, and she spoke of it to Richard Orchardson.

The two were seated together during the twilight on a secluded part of the deck. Priscilla had an open book upon her lap. Richard was finishing the perusal of an old letter, which he had received from home just before sailing. Having

read it slowly through, he folded up the closely-written sheet, and put it into his pocket. Then bending forward he looked into the girl's pale thoughtful face.

'I must crave your forgiveness,' he said, quietly; 'my father sent many messages to you, and until this day I have forgot to deliver them.'

'Indeed,' answered Priscilla, quietly; 'he was always good and kind to me, and I thank him from my heart. I hope that when he wrote he was well and happy.'

'Yes, he was well, and seeing that he was alone, tolerably happy.'

'He should not be alone,' answered Priscilla, gravely. 'He had only you, you should have stayed with him like a good son—since you had no serious business or holy errand to take you away.'

For a time the two were silent; then the young man spoke again.

‘Priscilla, would you like to hear what my good father said?’

‘Assuredly, if it is well for me to hear it.’

‘Then listen: “I am dull, dear Dick—very dull and sad; but I would bear it all right gleefully if I could but look forward to the day when you would come back to me, with Priscilla Sefton for my daughter and your wife!”’

‘He did not say that!’

‘Assuredly, he did.’

‘Then you should not have told me. Nay, do not speak of it; if you do, I shall keep my word and never trust you again.’

‘Then I will speak of it no more.’

Again they were silent; this time Priscilla was the first to speak.

‘Did your father give you no news?’ she asked quietly; ‘hath he not spoken in that letter of any one I know?’

'He has mentioned many ; of whom were you thinking most particularly, Mistress Priscilla ?'

She paused a moment, then replied,

'Of the Christiansons, of Fen Farm !'

How dark the man's face grew ! for a moment he almost hated the little demure figure at his side.

'Why do you ask for *them* ?'

'Because I am interested in them, and because I fear that since I left the village some harm hath surely come to them.'

'Why do you think that, Priscilla ?'

'I will tell you. You heard me cry out the other night—and I am sure you have since wondered wherefore. Well, you shall know now. 'Twas because I did suddenly see the face of poor Christian Christianson, as plainly as I see yours now !'



‘ His face! where?’

‘ On this vessel. The moonlight was strong and bright, it fell full upon the face. It made it so strange and clear, that had I been on land I should have sworn that I had seen the living man.’

‘ A foolish fancy! Good heavens, you cannot think it more!’

Priscilla smiled quietly.

‘ That is a strange question,’ she said. ‘ How could it be aught else, when we both know poor Christian to be hundreds of miles away? But the memory of that strange vision troubles me, and makes me think that something terrible may have happened since I came here!’

‘ Priscilla!’

‘ Well, my friend.’

‘ Be advised by me—try to forget Brightlinghead—and, above all, think of Christian Christianson—no more!’

‘Why do you tell me to forget my friends?’

‘Because I have your welfare at heart—because I wish to shield you from harm.’

‘Which might come to me through Christian Christianson?’

‘Which *will* come to you, to us both, through him, if we ever cross his path again. He hateth both me and mine with bitter, undying hatred—as meaningless as it is strong. Ever since my boyhood he has made himself terrible to me. He knew he was the stronger of the two, and he used all his strength against me. He persecuted me continually, and to this day I bear the mark of his brute hand. I bore it all because I pitied him, but now all is changed: since we both knew you, he hath known the power of hurting me in a way I cannot bear!’

He paused, and looked into her face—it was very pale; and her hands were clenched convulsively together. It was better than he had anticipated; she was passive, if not pleased; so he went on.

‘Priscilla, will you forgive me if I speak?’

‘Nay, there is one theme on which I have besought you never to speak to me!’

‘And after this day I will try to obey you; but hear me now. Priscilla, Christian Christianson knew I loved you. He knew that by tearing you from me he could blight my life and make me a miserable man. He knew that by poisoning your soul against me, he could hurt me more keenly than ever he had been able to do, and it was thus he tried to strike me. He wooed you from me, and he chilled your heart against me—not that

he loved you, but that he hated me! So, God knows, I have cause to hate him in turn; but I would forgive him all he ever did to me, if you would promise me never, God willing, to cross his path again!

Priscilla did not answer him. Her head was whirling round: her soul was stirred by a wild tumult which she could not quell.

Richard Orchardson watched her. So intent was he that he had not noticed a black figure crawl stealthily along the deck and crouch like a snake behind them.

He looked at Priscilla; she was still silent: he bent forward and took her hand.

'Priscilla,' he said, 'it will be a pitiful day for you if ever you take that man's hand in friendship again. He belongs to

an evil race. The father was a beggar and a borrower of my father's bounty. The sister is an outcast, as you know, despised by all good women. For himself, he hath all the taint of the breed, without one redeeming virtue—his father's dishonesty, his mother's stubborn ingratitude, his sister's infirmity of disposition. If I told you all I know of him, you would despise him freely, and banish him for ever from your heart.'

He stopped suddenly—the crouching figure rose, sprang forward, and a hand of iron gripped the slanderer by the throat.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## FACE TO FACE AGAIN.

RICHARD looked up in horror, while Priscilla uttered a terrified cry.

‘Liar!’ repeated the man, still gripping Richard by the throat.

There was no more mystery now. It was Christian Christianson in the flesh who stood before them, his face livid and terrible, his eyes burning, his strong frame, wrapt in its sailor’s rags, trembling with passion.

‘Help!’ shrieked Richard; and the next moment the two men were struggling and clinging together in a murderous embrace.

There was a hurried tramp of feet, a quick rush of figures across the deck, and then, at the captain's sudden word of command, the men fell as one man upon the pair, and tore off Christian by sheer force.

Pale as death, half strangled, and terrified to the soul, Richard stood clinging to the bulwarks, and trembling violently.

'What's all this?' cried the skipper, cocking his one eye fiercely at Christian, who still struggled like a wild beast in the grasp of the crew. 'A sailor assaulting one of my passengers! Keep quiet, will you, John Dyson, or I'll hev you knocked on the head with a marling-spike! What's it all about?'

'For God's sake secure that man,' gasped Richard. 'He—he has tried to murder me!'

The skipper turned savagely on Chris-

tian, but before he could say another word, Priscilla had stepped forward and was looking into the prisoner's face.

'Christian! is it possible? Nay, I can scarce believe mine own eyes. Alas! what brought you here?'

Christian gazed down at her wildly, but did not answer; his fatal homicidal passion still mastered him, and he made another frantic struggle to be free.

'What, you know this man?' cried the skipper, in unaffected astonishment, to Priscilla.

'Yes,' answered Priscilla, 'I know him well.'

'And I know him,' exclaimed Richard, tremulously grasping the captain's arm, 'and I warn you that my life is in danger unless he is safely secured. He hath followed me on board this vessel to kill me, and I demand protection.'



Grim as death now, the skipper walked up to Christian, and looked him sternly in the face.

‘Speak *you*, John Dyson! or whatever the ’tarnal your name is. Hev you anything to say for yourself?’

Christian answered between his set teeth,

‘Nothing—that man has spoken the truth.’

‘What?’

‘I came to kill him, and I *shall* kill him, be sure of that.’

An ugly look came into the worthy skipper’s face, a baleful light into his one eye.

‘So killing’s your game, is it?’ he said dryly. ‘Waal, I’ll teach you to try it on aboard *my* ship. Take him below, and put him in irons at once.’

Before Priscilla could interfere, Chris-

tian was dragged forward. He had ceased to struggle now, and walked away quite quietly, but the expression on his firm-set face had not changed.

No sooner had he disappeared, than Priscilla fell swooning upon the deck.

The skipper raised her gently in his arms, while Richard sprinkled water on her face and tried to restore her. When she came to, she looked wildly around her, as if seeking a familiar face.

‘Is it *thou*, Christian?’

Richard’s white face grew positively livid as he heard the hated name.

Then recollection came to her, in one vivid electrifying flash, and she covered her face with her hands and began to weep hysterically.

The skipper’s eye watered, for Higginbotham, despite his Cyclopean physiognomy, was a tender-hearted man when the

ladies were in question, and could not bear to see a lovely woman in trouble.

‘There’s more in this than I thought,’ he reflected. ‘John Dyson, I calculate, is more than a common sailor, and my name isn’t E. M. Higginbotham if missie’s pretty face hasn’t brought him arter it across the sea.’

Then he said aloud,

‘Now look’ee, young mistress! Though your friend John Dyson’s in irons, he’s all safe and squar’, and no harm will come to him as long as he keeps quiet. When he passes his word to carry on like a sensible critter, and not like a raging sea-sarpint, I pass *my* word that we’ll knock off them irons and set him free.’

Inspired by a new thought, Priscilla raised her pretty pleading face, with the tears still sparkling in her eyes, and stretched out her trembling hand.

'Oh, sir, may I speak to him? He hath a good heart, and I think he will listen to me!'

'Speak to him, and welcome,' answered the skipper, kindly.

But Richard interposed quickly.

'On no account! I tell you the man is a dangerous maniac. Nay! you shall *not* go to him.'

But Priscilla was determined. Her heart was very full, and she yearned to find out what wild and desperate thought had brought Christian there; to speak to him some words of comfort, and perhaps of gentle rebuke and entreaty; to cast out, as far as might be, and as she had done more than once before, the evil demon that possessed him.

So in spite of Richard's renewed protestations she went forward with the captain, and descended, with the help of

rough but friendly hands, to the dark fore-castle den, where Christian sat a prisoner, handcuffed and heavily ironed.

He looked up as she appeared before him, but did not utter a word.

Priscilla looked at him for several minutes before he made any sign of recognition, although he turned his head and looked at her, but he still kept silent.

‘Christian, listen to me!’

‘Well, Priscilla?’

‘I have got the good captain’s leave to speak with thee; and I have come to see if you have aught to say?’

She spoke demurely, almost timidly; Christian listened darkly, but moving his head restlessly from side to side, like a beast in physical pain. The thirst for vengeance had at that moment almost supplanted love. Looking at Priscilla, he knew that she had just come from the

side of his enemy, and glancing fiercely down at the irons which secured him, he fretted more wildly to be free. As for Priscilla, she was thinking little at that moment of Richard Orchardson, her mind was so sorrowfully sad at the sight before her. She longed to be tender, and that very longing made her manner stranger and colder than it had ever been before.

‘Will you not speak to me?’ she asked at length. ‘Have you nothing to say?’

‘Nothing.’

‘What hath made you leave your home, your mother, your sister, and come here upon the sea?’

The man uttered a laugh which was painful to hear.

‘Home?’ he said, ‘nay, I have no home. My mother lies in the graveyard, my sister is an outcast, broken-hearted,

and I am here with one thought only,—  
to hunt down the devil who has been the  
cause of all our woe!’

Priscilla shrank back in terror.

‘Christian, talk not so. It is blasphemous.’

‘And it is not blasphemous to break  
an aged woman’s heart ; to ruin an innocent  
maid, and bring beggary and destruction  
on a happy home! Look you, mistress,  
I am not fit company for you. You had  
best go back to him who is your choice.’

‘It is not like you to talk so—you  
were not wont to pain me.’

‘God alone knows what I was wont to  
do. The past is dead to me ; ’tis with the  
future I have to do now. My work is  
cut out before me. I mean to finish it  
before I die.’

He turned his head as if he wished the

conversation to end, but Priscilla did not move away. Once already she had fled from him, and her regret had been so keen as to hold her firm now. She moved a few steps towards him, and laid her hand tenderly upon his arm.

‘Good Christian,’ she said quietly, ‘if I were to listen to the voice of pride within me, I should walk straight back to my cabin yonder, and never seek your presence here again. But I know you better than you know yourself. Come, do not treat me as an enemy or a false friend, for you know well I am neither; but tell me what has brought you here?’

‘I have told you already, mistress; I mean to have my just revenge.’

‘Upon Mr. Orchardson?’

‘Ay,’ answered Christian, in a voice so terrible that she shrank back again.

‘Alas! you are bitterly to blame. Why



are you so bent upon hunting a fellow-creature down?’

‘Why?—because he and his have been the scath and scourge of me and mine; because I lay at *his* door the sorrow of my sister, whom he betrayed to shame, the broken heart of my mother, and the miserable shattering of all our lives!’

‘No, no!’ cried Priscilla, ‘you are madly wrong. Your poor sister——’

‘*He* betrayed her—with her own lips she told me that he betrayed her.’

‘It is not possible!’

‘It is certain,’ cried Christian. ‘But there, talk not of her; hath *he* not told you that her name is unfit to pass your lips? and perchance he spoke the truth; but before God I swear to you, as I swore before, that for every bitter tear she hath shed I will have a drop of his heart’s blood!’

His passion was so overmastering that she stood appalled. She saw that words were useless, that they fell like drops of dew upon a flaming brand. So she stood wringing her hands, and weeping for very fear.

Then she cried through her tears :

‘Christian! once—not so long ago—you said you loved me—and you swore for my sake to be a good man. Listen to me, in God’s name! It would be better to die, better to be lying in your grave, than nurse such terrible thoughts! It is true that you have suffered; but alas! to suffer is our lot; and as God forgives us our trespasses, so should we forgive those that trespass against us. Forgive Richard Orchardson! You must! you will!’

She paused, but Christian did not answer her. Emboldened by his silence, she went on :

‘If I could induce you to forget and forgive, to leave all these heartbreaking troubles behind you, and begin a new life, all might yet be well, and with God’s blessing——’

‘Do not talk of it—I seek not God’s blessing; all I seek is to have vengeance upon my enemy; for that I’ll watch and wait, and though I wait for fifty years the time will come.’

For some little space yet, Priscilla remained and continued her gentle pleading; but at every word Christian grew more morose, and at last he would answer nothing. At length, with a weary disappointed sigh she left him, saying to him that she would come back again, and vowing in her heart that she would leave no device untried to turn him from the wicked purpose upon which he had set his heart.

For she said to herself, 'It seems to me that sorrow has turned his brain. God help him—and may God help *me* to bring some solace to his soul.'

On the after-deck she met Richard Orchardson ; he paused to speak to her, but Priscilla, with a strange shrinking at her heart, passed silently by, and quickly gained her cabin.

There she sat down to think. She reviewed the story which Christian had unfolded in broken hints, and as she did so her heart was filled with a bitterness almost as strong as that which filled the heart of the injured man, while the thought of Richard Orchardson made her sick with shame. So Richard was the girl's betrayer, and yet he had looked on unmoved when she lay almost dying at Priscilla's feet. Priscilla's eyes were opened now. She frankly acknowledged to herself that

Christian had bitter cause for hatred, and the pity in her soul strengthened the love which he had already awakened there.

As the night wore on, she felt she could not rest below. Still shocked and agitated beyond measure, she went again on deck.

Close to the cabin companion, she encountered the worthy captain.

‘Waal,’ he said, with a kindly smile, ‘how hev you left John Dyson now? Hev you brought that young man to his senses?’

Tears stood in the girl’s eyes as she replied, just touching the lappet of the skipper’s coat with her little hand.

‘O captain dear, you have a kind heart, and I am sure you will pity him, for he hath had much, much trouble. His name is not John Dyson, but Christian Christianson, and great sorrows have made him mad.’

‘ Ah! I knew from the fust he were no common sailor, his hands were too soft and white, his tongue too civil and free. But I daren’t set him loose till he dew come to his senses and promises to behave hisself all squar’. Can I take his word, think you, if he promises that?’

‘ Yes,’ replied Priscilla. ‘ Whatever he saith, he will fulfil.’

The skipper nodded good-humouredly, and strolled forward. Priscilla was about to follow him, when Richard emerged from the companion, and greeted her with a joyful exclamation. To his renewed surprise, she turned her head away, and tried to pass by without a word.

‘ What is the matter?’ he cried, reaching out his hand to detain her.

She shook off the touch with a shiver of horror, and made another attempt to pass. But he persisted.

‘I see,’ he said, turning white with agitation ; ‘it is as I feared. That villain hath been poisoning your thoughts against me.’

‘He is no villain,’ answered Priscilla with sudden intensity ; ‘if he hath spoken truth, *you* are the villain, not he !’

Richard’s face went whiter ; he trembled from head to foot with a new and sickening fear.

‘What hath he said ?’

‘He hath justified himself against you—that is enough.’

‘By more lies and calumnies,’ cried Richard, while his face became full of anger and despair. ‘And you have listened to him ! *You !* Then God help me, for I am wronged indeed.’

‘You are not wronged—he and his have been wronged from the beginning.’

‘It is false, Priscilla, though you say it.’

‘It is true.’

‘Tell me what he hath said. At least, let me defend myself.’

‘You cannot,’ answered Priscilla.

‘Let me try!’

Thus urged, Priscilla told him what she had heard concerning himself and poor Kate Christianson. At the first breath of the accusation, Richard shrank like a guilty thing, while his face went from pale to red, from red to pale, and his whole frame shook with agitation. But as she proceeded, scarcely looking in his eyes, for her sense of the shameful tale made her own cheeks crimson, he had time to recover his self-possession.

When she ceased, he smiled sadly, and heaved a heavy sigh.

‘It is as I thought,’ he said. ‘Well, so be it. You have judged me unheard, and I must submit.’



‘I have not judged you,’ she returned with a certain hesitation, ‘it is for God to judge you—but is it true or false?’

‘False, every word!’ cried Richard fervently.

She started, and looked him in the face. There was nothing to betray him there—only a deep sorrow, and a sullen sense of cruel injury.

‘Christian would not lie,’ she said.

‘He would do worse than lie, to injure me in your esteem. To poison your soul against me he would invent—as he hath invented—calumnies as black as hell. Well, since he can do so much, let him do more. Go, set him free. Let him take my wretched life. I do not care now.’

And he turned away as if to hide his face and weep.

At this cunning piece of acting, her certainty was shaken, and her gentle heart

was touched. Could it be possible, she thought, that Christian, ever headstrong and prone to err, had been misled? Then she suddenly remembered that the accusation had come, not from idle hearsay, but from Kate Christianson's own lips.

'His sister hath told him,' she said; 'she accused you. Oh it is terrible! God must punish such cruel deeds! His mother lies dead in her grave, of a broken heart.'

Then, with a heavy sob, able no longer to speak or listen, she descended to her cabin, and sank upon her knees in prayer.

## CHAPTER IX.

## PRISCILLA MAKES HER CHOICE.

RICHARD ORCHARDSON stood on the lonely deck, and looked up wildly to the stars of the night, which were thickly clustering over the quiet sea. Despair and rage were in his soul; for he saw too plainly that Heaven and the girl's heart were against him, and that the last chance was lost, unless he could prove himself innocent in Priscilla's eyes.

And as he looked upward, with many a muttered curse upon his enemy's head, he was troubled by no qualms of conscience for any past misdeed, but rather experienced

a gloomy feeling of oppression, a sullen sense of wrong.

No man's soul is unmixed evil ; indeed, such a soul would be monstrous, not human ; and Richard Orchardson felt that night that he was among the most injured of men. He sincerely loved Priscilla ; he had followed her over the high seas with a feeling very like devotion ; he felt, moreover, that from day to day her influence wakened and kept alive what was best and noblest in his nature ; he had almost forgotten alike the animosities and the follies of his early life ; he was, in a word, in the position of the culprit who honestly desires to reform, and who (to quote the moralist) is 'going to turn over a new leaf.' Yet Providence itself seemed against him. Just as the prize of virtue was in his grasp, just as he was growing happy with the dreamy hope of sweet

possession, all was changed as by a miracle, and between himself and felicity rose again the human being he hated most.

Yes, it was enough to make a man blaspheme and curse his stars! Why had not a kindly Providence kept this man away, buried him mountain deep under the earth, or sunk him to the bottom of the sea? Why did he live, to darken the sunshine?

There was danger, too. So long as Christian lived, Richard Orchardson knew that his own life might at any moment pay the forfeit. As the thought crossed his mind, he shivered with a sickening sense of dread.

While Orchardson was nervously pacing the after deck, furious with his own thoughts, yet timidly starting at every sound, Captain Higginbotham was below, questioning the prisoner.

Seated on a bunk, face to face with Christian, whose face he saw dimly by the light of a swinging lamp, the skipper tried his hand at cross-examination.

‘Waal, how dew you feel now, John Dyson, or whatever else the ’tarnal your name is? Dew you feel like fighting, or dew you feel like giving in? I calculate you’re come to your senses by this time; for there’s nothing like sitting in ship’s irons for cooling a man’s ideas.’

‘You are mistaken, captain,’ answered Christian, quietly; ‘I am of the same mind still.’

‘Then you won’t pass your word to keep afore the mast, and dew your work like a man, and let that young randydandy alone?’

‘No.’

‘You’re a bold hand, John Dyson, I do calculate. What’s it all about? Come,

tell me slick and squar'. About a gel? About young missie there in the cabin? Waal, she's too good for either of you, she is, and that's a fact; but theer, young randydandy's a gentleman, and you're only a common man.'

'Nay, I am as gently born as he,' said Christian, 'and by the same token of older blood. But that is neither here nor there. I have sworn to kill him, and kill him I shall.'

'Not aboard my ship,' cried the skipper, more and more astonished by the man's quiet determination yet subdued demeanour. 'If you try it on aboard the *Miles Standish*, you'll swing from the yardarm as sure as your name's John Dyson. But that ain't your name neither,' he added reflectively; 'young mistress calls you Christian; and a precious Christian you air, to be trying to take the life

of a fellow-critter! Waal, Dyson or no Dyson, Christian or no Christian, you'll wake and sleep in them irons till you change your mind.'

So saying, the skipper withdrew, and made his way on deck.

All that night Christian sat silent in his place, and never closed his eyes. Thoughts wild and terrible, stormy and sad, possessed him, and kept soul and body wide awake; besides, the physical irritation caused by the fettering irons was growing keen enough to drive away all sleep. So he sat moodily resigned as to the present, and tried to plan his conduct for the days that were to come.

But the more he thought, the more moody and despairing he grew; for it seemed in this, as in everything else, that the hand of God was against him. He

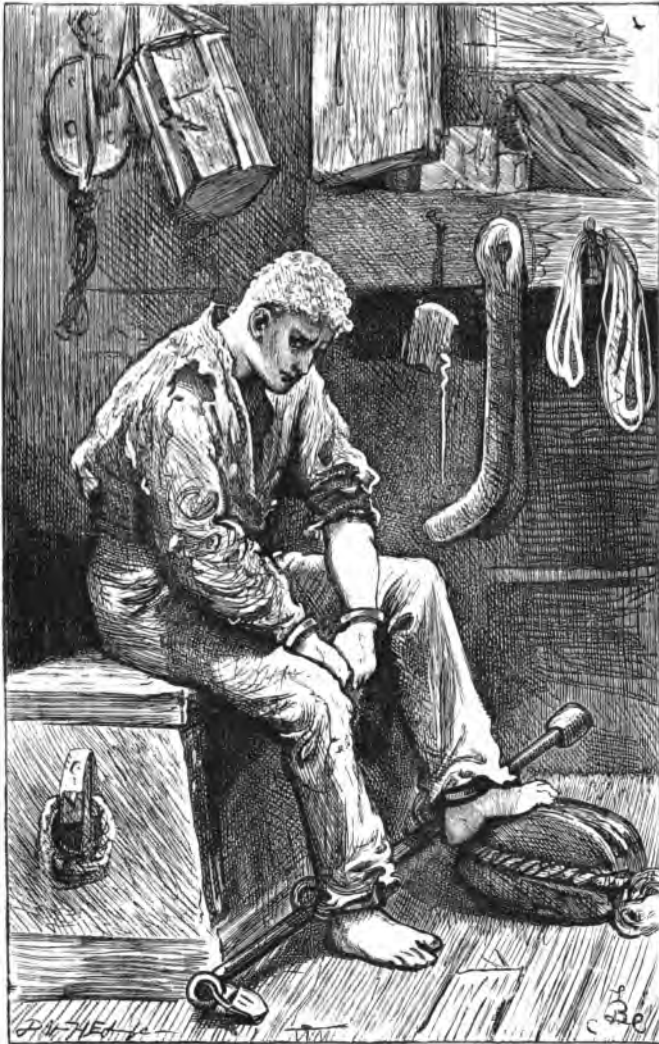


was sorry now that he had revealed himself; that one mad act had rendered him helpless. If he could only get free; if he could but stand for one day only, and hold within his hand the life of his enemy, he would ask no more!

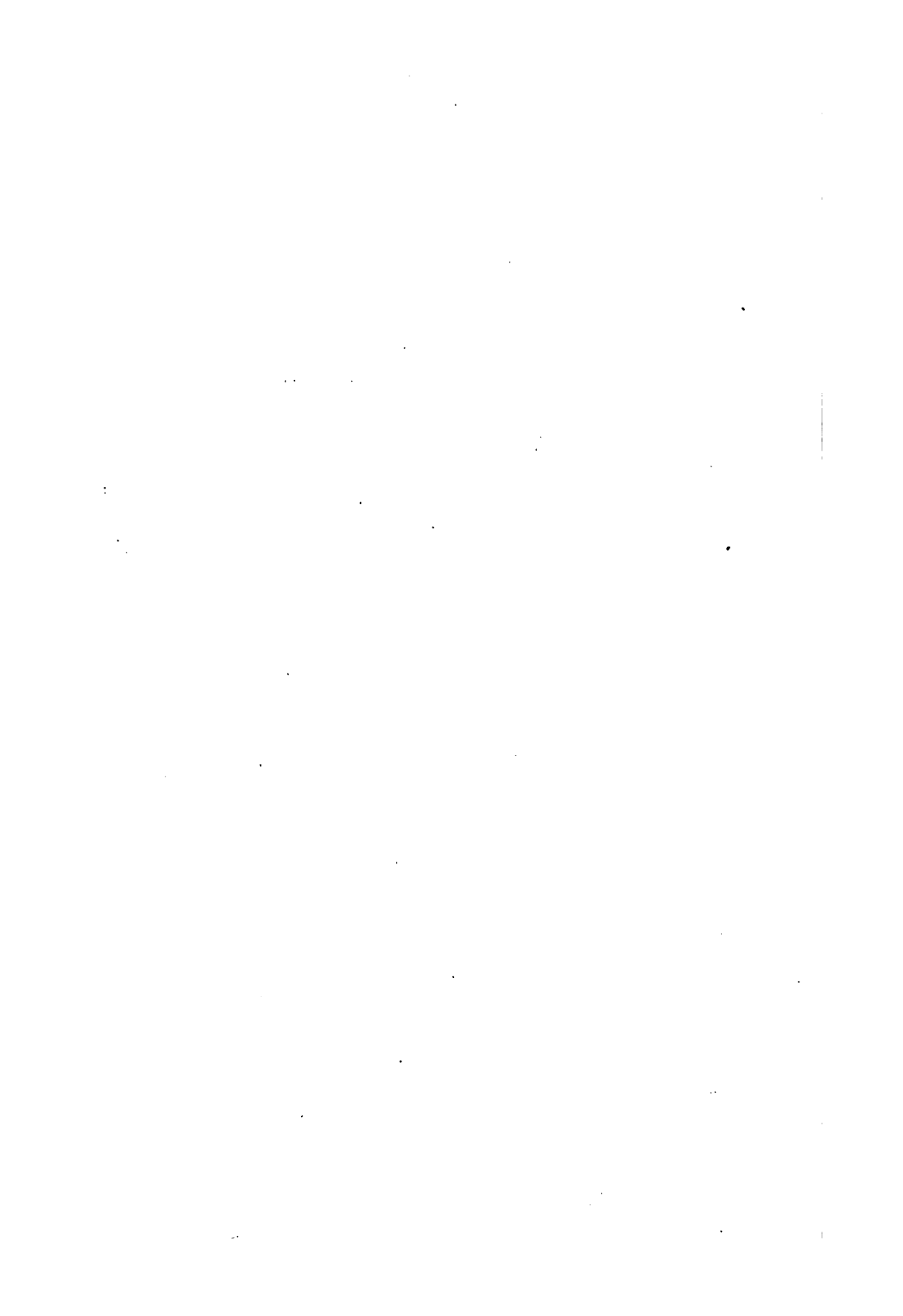
The hours dragged wearily on; night passed away, and the cold, grey light of dawn streamed down from the troubled sky, and found the man more pitifully sick at heart than ever.

That day the wind freshened; most of the hands were busy on deck, and Christian was left alone. When the day was nearly spent, a figure crept quietly into the fore-castle, and a tender, trembling hand was laid upon his arm. Turning quickly, he looked straight into the eyes of Priscilla.

The sight of her face startled him. She looked so pale, so careworn, so different from the happy, pensive little maiden



*‘The cold, grey light of dawn streamed down from the troubled sky, and found him more pitifully sick at heart than ever.’*



whom he had known, loved, and dreamed of. Was it Priscilla—was he dreaming or waking? for the figure which he saw crept up to his side like a docile child, kissed his hand, and moistened it with tears.

‘Priscilla?’

‘Yes, Christian, it is I. I have been waiting for hours to come to you, but could not get leave; and I dared not brave the good captain’s orders for fear of bringing you to still greater harm; but he consents to the meeting now, and I have come.’

‘Priscilla, dear Priscilla!’ cried Christian, deeply moved, ‘what ails you that you are so pale, so strange?’

‘Nay, ’tis nothing,’ said the girl, wearily passing her hand across her eyes; ‘do not speak of *me*, it is of you I wish to talk. Oh, Christian, Christian, it is breaking my heart!’

‘ Breaking your heart ? ’

‘ The thought of you, the sight of you, with these cruel chains about you—I cannot sleep at night, and I cannot rest all day. Christian, I shall never know a moment’s peace till the man I love is free!’

Was he awake or dreaming? Was it all true or possible? Could it be Priscilla who spoke, who uttered the very words which he knew it was life to him to hear? Yes, she had spoken at last, she loved him, and for a moment the terrible darkness which oppressed his soul seemed to pass away.

‘ My darling!’ he murmured; and Priscilla, gazing up at him through her tears, asked quietly,

‘ Christian, am I right? your heart is not changed—you care for me still?’

‘ Care for you! merciful God, what a question!’

‘Ah, then it is true, and I am glad. Christian, dear, dear Christian, as you love me, save yourself for me; give one promise to the captain, and he will take off these cruel irons; and when we reach land, we will depart in peace!’

She paused, but he was silent. He knew now what she would have; and though his love for her was strong—ay, stronger a thousandfold than it had ever been—vengeance arose and gained the mastery.

‘Christian, answer me. I do not ask you to forgive him, I only ask you to save yourself, and—yes, I will say it—to keep my heart from breaking.’

‘God knows, Priscilla, I would give my life to spare you pain. As well ask me to give up my life, Priscilla, as to let that man go free.’

‘Oh do not say so! God does not

suffer such sins as his to go unpunished ; but it is His work, not thine, Christian. Promise me, make me happy for this night at least, and all will yet be well.'

She bent above his hand and kissed it again ; then, with a sudden impulse, she cast her arms about his neck, and hid her face upon his bosom.

'My darling!' he murmured ; 'Priscilla, don't weep ; whatever comes to me, I know that you will be secure from harm.'

'But you will give me your promise?'

'Ask me not to-night, Priscilla ; come to me again, my darling ; but first before you go, answer me one thing.'

'Yes.'

'If I promise to let this man live, to forget all our house's wrongs, what then—what of yourself, Priscilla?'

'Of myself?'

‘Will you become my wife?’

She was silent, looking down and trembling. Presently she answered,

‘At least I will promise this: To marry no other living man.’

‘You will—you swear it?’

‘Yes.’

‘My darling, my own brave girl! Now go, Priscilla, for you are weary; but you will come to me again?’

‘Oh yes, I will come.’

She laid her gentle head upon his bosom, and suffered him to kiss her cheek. Then, her bosom heaving with a strange new sense of mingled sorrow and joy, she crept quietly from the fore-castle and left him there alone.

Priscilla slept soundly that night; and her sleep was attended by pleasant dreams. She arose in the morning looking better and prettier than she had done for days,



and asked for an early interview with the captain.

This she had little difficulty in obtaining; Polypheme, always taken by a pretty face, was unusually partial to Priscilla.

He received her in his own cabin, and bent his one eye upon her with a more benign look than ever. How pretty she looked in her grey gown, with the new-born light of love in her eyes! She had come to plead her lover's cause; and the excitement of this, coupled with a strange bashfulness caused by the memory of the interview of the preceding night, suffused her cheeks with colour, and put a tremulous smile upon her lips.

But she spoke so earnestly, and pleaded so well, that the captain, who at first seemed obdurate, listened with some attention, and promised at length to go and speak with Christian again,

and so ascertain if it would be possible for him to grant Priscilla's request.

'All I ask of you,' she said, 'is to set him free. 'Tis cruel to keep him bound and a prisoner, when he hath committed no offence.'

The captain, who guessed the reason of her pleading, smiled grimly.

'What may be his name, did you say, mistress?'

'Christian Christianson.'

'A good name for one that's slick and squar'; but I tell you he ain't slick and squar! He's about as bold a hand as ever come aboard the *Miles Standish*. He come aboard as a common sailor, and now I calculate he's a gentleman who's working his way to the gallows!'

'He was mad with trouble and shame, and knew not what he did. Be kind to him, captain dear; remember with what

measure you mete it shall be meted to you again!’

The captain rubbed his horny hand over his weather-beaten brow, and sat in sore perplexity.

‘Tain’t fair for you to tackle *me*. I ought to do my duty, missie; and my duty is to keep the man in irons.’

‘No, no.’

‘But yes. I don’t say I mean to do it, but I tell you it’s my duty; and never afore to-day has Ezekiel M. Higginbotham known what ’tis to turn away from duty. Look you here, my dear, if you come here with your pretty face and pleading ways, you’ll be the ruin o’ me. But say no more. I know what I know. Guess them irons hurt *you* more a precious sight than they hurt the chap that wears them. He’s a tough ’un; I take no account of him; but for you, my dear—there, go

right away, or Captain Higginbotham won't know the meaning of duty soon.'

So Priscilla, feeling that just at present nothing more was to be done, imprinted a grateful kiss upon the captain's hand and left him.

No sooner had she disappeared than another figure entered without ceremony into the captain's cabin. This was Richard Orchardson. His face was very pale, his brow lowering, his hand twitching nervously; he closed the door before he spoke.

'Captain Higginbotham,' he said, 'do you mean to do what the girl has asked you? do you mean to release the ruffian who is in irons for assaulting me?'

The first surprise of the meeting over, the captain glared upon his visitor with anything but a pleasant light in his eye.

'Eavesdropping,' he muttered. 'Young

man, I calculate you'd be better employed in keeping your own berth, than placing your darn'd ear at the keyhole of my cabin door. As for what I do, and what I don't do, it ain't no consarn of yours !'

'Tis my concern this far. That wretch threatened my life, and you heard him. You put him in irons, because you knew it was the only means of keeping me from harm. Let him free, and what is the result? I am on board ship, in mid ocean, and unable to defend myself; my enemy, set free by you, will carry out his devilish purpose, and murder me.'

If the expression on the captain's face might be trusted, Polypheme evidently thought that the deed would be well done. He was a rough-and-ready old sailor, but he had knocked about a good deal, and so had gained no little insight

into human nature. The little drama which was being enacted about him, he understood by this time tolerably well. He had seen into the hearts of his three passengers: he adored Priscilla; and of the two men he certainly gave the preference to John Dyson. Though at first he had been much irritated at the deception which had been used, the man's rough openness of manner appealed to him infinitely more than did the more polished conduct of his enemy and rival. Still, with all his prejudices, he was obliged to acknowledge the truth; and the truth was, that if he released Christian Christianson to please Priscilla, he certainly rendered himself liable for whatever evil consequences might ensue.

This reflection by no means improved the captain's temper. He turned roughly upon his companion,

‘Waal, young man, have you done?’

‘Yes; I’ve warned you, and that is enough for me. Whatever you do, you must answer for before man and God, remember that!’

‘Yes, I guess I *will* remember it, my friend,’ muttered the captain to himself as Orchardson moved away; ‘I guess I’ll remember every darn’d word you’ve uttered, for I like the cut of your jib less than ever. Waal, the little girl had some sense anyhow, when she made sail from such as you!’

Utterly beside himself with passion, Orchardson strode angrily to the after cabin; he had played his trump card; if that failed, what could he do? That the captain, in utter defiance of his wish, would dare to set Christian free he could not for a moment believe; but although he could force him to keep Christian in

irons for some little time, he could not force him to forbid Priscilla those stolen interviews to which he had already been a witness. Yes, he had seen her throw her arms around the man's neck, kiss his hand, and wet it with her tears. Here was the gall which was working so bitterly in his soul. He determined, at all hazard, to put an end to this uncertainty. If she would not marry him, she should not marry his enemy; nay, sooner than that, he himself would take the initiative, and kill the man, or take her into his arms and leap with her into the sea.

He sought an interview with Priscilla; and at length he obtained it; but it left him more distraught and agitated than ever. It was clear to him that, so long as Christian lived, there was no room for another in Priscilla's heart.



Then, between jealousy, despair, and fear, the man's nature grew diabolic. A thousand desperate dreams and schemes flitted through his brain; until at last he was ready to draw destruction upon his own head, so long as his enemy's destruction and discomfiture were ensured at the same time.

## CHAPTER X.

## BETWEEN TWO ELEMENTS.

IN the dead of the calm autumn night, when all on board the vessel except the watch were sound asleep, and when the captain himself was snoring comfortably in his cabin, there suddenly arose a loud cry of alarm forward, followed by a rush of feet across the decks.

The next minute the mate rushed into the captain's cabin.

'What's the matter?' asked Higginbotham, leisurely opening his one eye.

'Something wrong forrard—for God's sake come, it looks like fire!'

In an instant the captain, who was

only partially undressed, was on his feet. Of all alarms that can startle a brave sailor's heart on the high seas, that of fire is surely the most terrible; and the captain, though he was bold as a lion, shook like a leaf.

'I'm coming!' he said, beneath his breath. 'Don't alarm the passengers; and, above all, keep it quiet from the women.'

The night was dark and still, the wind strong but gentle and fair, the ship, under all her wealth of snowy canvas, gliding smoothly along from billow to billow. On the forward deck the crew were collected in a crowd, some half-dressed, as if newly startled from sleep, all, pale and panic-stricken as frightened sheep, gazing down. The scuttle of the forecabin was off, and from the dark hole a thick black smoke was rising, with a heavy suffocating smell.

‘Man the buckets!’ cried the skipper. ‘Rig the head pump and get ready the hose.’

The men rushed to and fro obeying the order; and soon a steady stream of water was pouring down the scuttle. The main pump was kept going, and buckets of sea water were passed from hand to hand and poured down; but the water seemed only to feed and thicken the smoke which grew momentarily more sulphurous and black.

‘Where’s the fire?’ gasped the captain. ‘How did it begin?’

No one knew. All the watch on deck could tell was that their attention had suddenly been awakened by a burning smell, and the sight of smoke coming from below; and that they had given the alarm, and brought their comrades from their berths.

With wild shouts and cries the men continued labouring to get the fire under ; but it was obvious by this time that it was unmanageable : the dreadful smoke came thick as lava from the mouth of a volcano, blinding and suffocating the lookers-on.

Suddenly, in the midst of the tumult, the captain saw a white figure standing near to him, and heard a clear voice calling his name. He turned and recognised Priscilla.

‘ Don’t be alarmed, missie ! ’ he said.  
‘ Please God, we’ll get it under ! ’

But with a quick cry of terror she put her hands upon his arm.

‘ But Christian—is he safe ? Oh captain, he was down *there* ! ’

The skipper staggered as if struck by a bullet. In the terror and agony of the alarm, he had entirely forgotten the prisoner.

‘Where’s John Dyson?’ he cried in a voice of thunder.

No man answered; the men looked wildly at one another; the skipper groaned and waved his arms madly in the air.

‘My God, he’s below; and with them irons on, he can’t escape!’

Then pressing forward in defiance of the smoke, he shrieked down the scuttle,

‘Dyson! John Dyson!’

No answer came in words; but at that moment a tongue of sharp flame shot up through the scuttle, in the very heart of the darkness.

Priscilla screamed and fell upon her knees. Yes, Christian was there, helpless to save himself, stifling, suffocating, perhaps already dead.

‘Save him! save him!’ she cried.

The skipper hesitated, for he had a wife and little ones ashore; but in a

moment his mind was made up ; throwing off coat and waistcoat, he stood in his shirt-sleeves, facing the black columns of smoke.

‘ If there’s a man among ye, let him foller me ! ’ he cried, and plunged into the fore-castle.

The seamen stood in terror, shrinking back. All at once a black form, naked to the waist, leapt forward and followed. He was a gigantic negro who had once been a plantation slave, and now occupied a subordinate position in the cook’s galley.

Blacker and blacker rose the reek ; fiercer and more frequent grew the jets of fire, hissing and moaning under the streams of green water that still poured steadily down.

‘ Don’t stop pumping, ’ cried the mate ; ‘ it’s the only chance ! ’

A hushed and horrified silence fell

upon the groups of men ; they moved to and fro silently, and but for the renewed urging of the mate, would have stood paralysed with fear.

At that moment Priscilla saw, standing close to her, the figure of Richard Orchardson. He was leaning against the foremast, as if faint and terror-stricken.

‘Where is the captain?’ he cried to the mate, who stood by.

‘Down below, looking after one of the hands.’

‘You should not have suffered him! It will cost him his life.’

As Richard spoke, one wild cheer arose from the crew. Through the fore-castle scuttle, amidst the blinding blackness, appeared the skipper ; behind him came the negro ; and between them, supported in their powerful arms, was seen



the insensible form of Christian Christian-son.

At this moment the flame belched upward, bright as crimson lightning. Scorched and blinded, the negro let go his hold; but with a wild cheer, mate and crew rushed forward, and dragged the three figures out upon the dripping deck.

The negro fell forward on his knees, charred and wounded by the fire, which had licked round his limbs from below; the body of Christian fell like a log close to the spot where Priscilla was kneeling; while the little skipper, breathless and choking, but otherwise uninjured, began shrieking out his orders to the crew.

The fire now shot up in steady streams, and caught the foresail, which, in a moment, became a sheet of flame, while a crackling roar ascended from below, with wilder bursts of crimson.

It was clear now that the ship was really doomed, and that in a few minutes she would be on fire from stem to stern.

‘Lower the boats!’ cried Captain Higginbotham. ‘Call the passengers!’

There was no need to call them. They were gathered together in a terrified throng at the waist, looking forward in horror; but among them stood the tall form of the blind preacher, the crimson light falling on his sightless orbs, his lips moving in solemn prayer.

The boats were lowered, and floated safely, with the rowers in their places, in the smooth sea on the port side; water kegs and provisions, rapidly gathered together, were placed in each; the ladders were placed, and the captain stood above them, guarding the passage.

‘The women first!’ he cried; and one by one the women were handed down

—some to the long-boat, some to the captain's gig. Then the mate ran aft with Priscilla in his arms; he had found her, half swooning, bending over Christian's insensible form.

She was handed gently down; her father followed; then Richard and the rest.

'Bring along John Dyson!' said the skipper; and at the word Christian was carried aft, and placed in the gig at Richard's very feet.

He did not stir, but he was breathing and alive.

What followed was like a frightful dream to all who had their senses in that dreadful hour. Almost before the boats could be cast free, the flames seized the entire vessel, played like fiery snakes around mast and rigging, caught the sails, which shrivelled up like paper, shrieked

and roared and flashed with scorching bloodshot beams and horrible sulphurous fume. The skies above, and the seas below, were crimson with the flame; the air was bright as with the red light of dawn, and the terrified people in the boats could see each other's faces.

The boats pushed off from the vessel's side, Captain Higginbotham standing erect in the stern of the gig, and looking back. Only those who know how a sailor loves his ship can understand what sorrow filled the stout skipper's heart as he looked his last at the *Miles Standish*. He had sailed her for years; he knew every seam and stitch upon her as well as a lover knows the beauty-spots in his mistress's face; and he had, moreover, a large pecuniary share in her ownership. Therefore, something like a tear glittered in his eye as he saw her drifting away

between the two elements, one consuming and destroying her above, the other waiting for her below.

In the boat with the captain were Mr. Sefton and Priscilla, Richard Orchardson, Christian, and a number of the emigrants. In the other boat, commanded by the mate, were the remainder of the emigrants and ship's company.

As the gig pushed off, Christian opened his eyes, and saw above him, in the red light, two familiar faces—those of Priscilla and Richard Orchardson. The girl's eyes were fixed on him, watching eagerly for a sign of returning life; the moment he stirred, she uttered a joyful exclamation.

But Richard Orchardson leant over, saying in a low voice to the captain,

'Put that man in the other boat, I beseech you!'

‘Nay, nay, let him stay here!’ said Priscilla; ‘or if he goes, let me go too.’

The skipper made no sign. He was still too busy looking at the ship. Like a fiery portent, she was drifting away before the wind; and they were already far enough away to lean on their oars and watch her in safety.

Richard repeated his request. Higginbotham turned at last.

‘Silence, and keep your place, young man!’ he said, sternly. ‘This ain’t no time for foolish quarrels, now we’re all together in the hands o’ God.’

And he added, pointing to Christian,  
‘Take off them irons!’

Two of the crew leant over at the word of command, and, setting Christian free, raised him to a sitting posture, with his body in the bottom of the boat, and his head resting against the gunwale. He

was breathing freely now, but was still dizzy and faint.

‘How are you now, John Dyson?’

Christian turned his head, and murmured something unintelligible. Then he suddenly became conscious of his enemy’s white face gazing down upon him, and he staggered to his knees, and tried to spring towards him.

‘Keep back,’ cried the skipper, ‘or, by thunder, over you go into the sea. Listen to me, John Dyson! I took you out of them flames, and I saved your life, but if you lift a finger agin any soul on board this boat, to the bottom of the sea you go.’

A general murmur from the boat’s crew showed that this was no mere empty threat. Several strong hands held Christian back; but, struggling and panting, he pointed at Orchardson, and cried,

‘Then speak to him! Ask him who set your ship on fire!’

‘What d’ye mean?’ said Higginbotham, startled at the words.

‘I mean that he did it! Look at him—he cannot deny it.’

Pale and trembling, Richard shrank back from Christian’s accusing finger.

‘The man is mad,’ he gasped.

But with a deep, threatening groan, the sailors paused on their oars, and glared at Richard Orchardson, while the skipper cried in a terrible voice,

‘Speak, *you!* If that man speaks truth, he’s spoken your death-sentence—he has, by the Eternal!’

‘It is false, false!’ cried Richard, wildly. ‘You must be mad as he to listen to such an accusation. You know he is my mortal enemy—you know he did seek my life; if anyone be guilty, it is he, not I!’



The boats were now close together, rocking on the dark billows of the sea.

A mile away the ship burned brightly, consumed and charred almost to the water's edge.

Suddenly there was a rush of flame heavenward, a heavy, thunderous roar; then darkness. The remains of the ship had sunk like a cinder to the bottom of the sea.

For a moment all eyes were turned that way, and everything was forgotten in the piteous sight. With the last glimpse of the vessel that had borne them so safely and so long, came a horrible sense of desolation.

They were alone in a frail boat, not on the gentle Pacific, where calm like that which surrounded them might last for days and days, but on the Atlantic Ocean of constant storms, where, if the tempest arose, no boat could hope to live.

‘Keep your places, all!’ said the captain. ‘We’ll hev all this out soon; and if so be that ship was fired by any living man aboard these boats, the hand of the Lord will point him out to us, never fear! But now we must shape our course, and try for to fall in with some passing ship—guess it’s our last chance out here on God Almighty’s ocean.’

## CHAPTER XI.

## CAST AWAY.

As the captain uttered the words, the solemn voice of the blind preacher arose as if in response, and all eyes were turned to the tall figure, sitting with uplifted arms in the midst of the little lines of emigrants gathered together in the boat.

‘We are in God’s hands, my brethren. Let us pray!’

Instantly the captain uncovered his head; the other men in the boat followed his example, while, in a perfectly calm voice, Mr. Sefton, who throughout all that night had never for a moment lost his serenity, poured out an extempore prayer

for help and guidance. When it was ended, the captain stood up in the stern, and in a loud voice gave his commands to the mate, who was steering the companion boat.

It was arranged that the two boats should keep each other in sight as well as possible ; but that, should any unforeseen circumstance come to separate them, attempt should still be made in either case to keep in the line of passing ships. To make for any land was impossible ; they were almost in mid-ocean. The only hope was that, before a tempest arose, they might be sighted from the deck of some vessel, and saved.

Only he who has been shipwrecked, and cast away on the great ocean in an open boat, can realise the hopelessness and weariness of the situation ; but the tale is one 'twice told ;' the circumstances too

familiar and common for detailed recapitulation.

It had been about midnight when the first alarm of 'fire' was given; and now, within less than one short hour, the ship had vanished in the consuming flame, and they were all homeless wanderers on the deep. The night was dark and chill. It needed a keen look-out to keep the other boat in view; but ever and anon the crew of one shouted to the crew of the other; and the voices had a strange, supernatural sound.

Dawn broke at last, with chilly gleams of wind and rain. The sun came out of the sea like an orange globe, and the light crept from ripple to ripple with faint prismatic rays, till the whole stretch of ocean was dimly lit. Then they saw on every side of them, whichever way they turned, the darkly heaving horizon line; but no sail.

The light came on haggard faces, worn with waiting and watching. At the tiller sat the captain, quiet and resolute, with a tender eye for the women, and a cheery word, when it was needed, for the men. Near to him was Priscilla and her father ; the latter with his eyes closed and his hands clasped, as if praying in sleep ; the former very wan and sad, with her eyes ever turned towards Christian, who sat watching her with bloodshot eyes from the bottom of the boat. Priscilla saw now with horror that his face was blackened as with smoke and fire, that his dress was smoke-covered and ragged, and one of his arms, which was bare to the elbow, badly burnt.

Since the captain had spoken in stern reproach, while ordering the prisoner's irons to be knocked off, Christian had scarcely stirred ; and, as if to keep his

spirit under sweet control, looked only at Priscilla, and never once turned his eyes again towards his enemy. Richard Orchardson sat deathly pale opposite to Priscilla, separated from Christian by several men and women. In the agony of those terrible hours, he seemed to have grown years older ; so pinched and grey were his features, so lifeless and dead his mien.

All that day the boats sailed on quietly together ; nothing happened of any consequence to break the dark monotony of the situation.

Towards nightfall the wind rose slightly ; and as the boat became awkward to run in the rough sea, a small sail was set forward, to give her comfortable steering way and keep her trim. She was heavily laden with her human freight, and needed careful management, to avoid

foundering in the rough 'jumble' that now began to rise.

Darkness fell ; and in its midst the sound of the wind and the surging of the sea became doubly dreadful. Cries and moans began to rise from the women ; and even the men uttered terrified exclamations from time to time.

But when the terror was highest, the voice of the blind preacher was heard again, enjoining prayer and trust in the Lord who made the sea. This man's courage and trust were so absolute, the moral influence of his presence was so great, that the brave skipper, who was brave as a lion, but less serenely pious, looked at him in growing admiration. Nor did he less admire the daughter, who emulated her father's resignation, and at his command led the voices of their people in a tender evening hymn.



And still Christian Christianson kept silent in his place, subdued by the solemnity of the situation, and tranquillised for the time being by the serene presence of her he so passionately loved.

On the morning of the second day, which broke calm and cold, with gusts of fitful wind on a short chopping sea, the look-out man in the captain's boat suddenly pointed to the horizon, and cried, 'A sail!' Almost simultaneously, they heard a cry from the companion boat, which was rising and falling a quarter of a mile away, and saw a man standing erect in the bow, straining his eyes towards the same point in the horizon.

And sure enough, all eyes, turning one way, beheld afar off, half lost in flying foam and vapour, now seen, now almost blurred from vision, a dark spot against

the background of a grey daylight,—a silhouette, like the sail of a small boat, which, being scrutinised by experienced men, resolved itself presently into the black topsail of a ship.

A wild cry went up from the poor shipwrecked folk, and all, as with one accord, turned to look at the captain.

His eye was fixed on the distant object, and his face was baleful and unexpressive even to stoniness; but his big heart was beating fast, and it was not without an effort that he concealed his agitation.

Priscilla was the first to break the silence.

‘Captain dear, is it a ship?’

He knew that all were watching and waiting for his answer, but he kept his eye still fixed on the distant object, and replied without turning his head,

‘Give me time, missie, give me time!’

Yes, 'tis a ship sure enough!' and then, as another wild cry went up from the boat, he added in a deep clear voice, 'Yes, 'tis a ship, but what of that? Wait a bit, forrard there! It's one thing for to see a ship, and another thing to be seen *by* a ship; and even once seen 'tis another thing to be *picked up* by a ship. Don't holler yet, but wait and watch!'

They waited patiently enough, because every moment brought the gladsome apparition nearer.

Daylight flamed behind it, while, black and portentous, sail after sail arose, and finally, the black hull itself. Then, as the light increased, and the wind came out of the light, and gladdening ripples danced everywhere upon the morning sea, they saw a goodly brig in full sail, bearing down towards them as fast as she could fly—sailing westward, with windward light be-

hind her. She was coming so straight for them, though doubtless they were as yet unseen, that there was no need to make any signal, save the little shred of sail, or to give any other sign of distress. They must and should be seen, that was certain.

With that certainty, came another deepening terror.

What could the barque be, and what human hearts did it contain? Perhaps it would pass cruelly by, without lending a succouring hand; for in those days, more than these, there were many devils afloat on the high seas. Perhaps those who manned her were wild and desperate men of some foreign nation, who might carry them away to untold sorrows, or nameless tortures of captivity.

‘What dew you make of her, William Long?’ cried the captain, addressing the look-out in the bow, an old sailor of

mighty experience. 'Is she a Yankee or a Britisher? a merchantman or a privateer?'

William Long's opinion was that she looked too small for a merchantman, and too squat for a privateer; that she was not a Yankee nor yet a Britisher, and was, if anything, a petty trader from some foreign port.

Hand over hand, the brig approached them; and at last they could plainly perceive, from the commotion on her decks, that they were seen. Suddenly there was a puff of smoke at her side, followed by a sharp report; she had fired a gun.

'Ready there!' cried the captain, while his face brightened. 'She's going to pick us up.'

Down she came, with dark faces crowding at her side. Then, to the huge joy of all these shipwrecked wayfarers,

she squared her yards, came round on the wind, and waited for the boats to run alongside.

‘A Dutchman, by the Eternal!’ cried the skipper delighted. ‘Boys, give her a cheer!’

Straightway sailors and passengers cheered together, and the cheer was echoed instantly from the other boat. In a few minutes more the captain had run his boat alongside, and one by one the wayfarers sprang on deck.

Facing them, on the deck of the brig, was a squat figure in a red cotton nightcap, smoking an enormous wooden pipe, and surrounded by a crew of squat pigmies, in red cotton nightcaps too. His face was broad, weather-beaten, and good-humoured, and he gave a friendly grunt as Higginbotham approached, and seized him by the hand.

An excited colloquy ensued, but as neither skipper understood a word of the language of the other, it led to no very definite result; until one of the Dutch seamen, stepping forward at a nod from his skipper, offered his services as interpreter. It then turned out that the barque was the *Anna* of Rotterdam, commanded by Jan Brock of the same city, and outward bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia. The accommodation on board was limited, especially in the after portions of the vessel, but such as it was, the wayfarers were welcome to share it—as well as the rough fare of the ship's crew, of which the *pièce de résistance* was (as after experience proved) the hardest of Dutch cheese.

But Captain Higginbotham was enraptured. Again and again he wrung his brother skipper's hand, and then, turning to his own passengers and crew, all of







*'Once alone there, she fell upon her knees, and thanked God for His great mercies.'*

whom were now on the *Anna's* deck, he loudly congratulated them on having fallen into the hands of a man and a brother.

The rescued people were distributed over the ship, the crew of the *Miles Standish*, including Christian, going forward to the fore-castle, the emigrants finding tolerable quarters amidships, while cramped accommodation was found in the captain's quarters aft for Priscilla and her father, Richard Orchardson, and Captain Higginbotham. Priscilla had a little cabin in the poop all to herself; it was very tiny, and smelt horribly of bilge water and tobacco; but once alone there, she fell upon her knees, and thanked God for His great mercies, and for her fortunate escape.

## CHAPTER XII.

## ICE-DRIFT FROM THE POLAR SEA.

CAPTAIN HIGGINBOTHAM, surveying his new friends leisurely with an eye of profound experience, soon discovered that good seamanship was by no means the characteristic of either skipper or crew; that the former spent a good deal of his time in his berth, pipe in mouth, under the influence of the Indian narcotic and his national liquor, and that the latter sailed the ship pretty much as sweet fancy taught them. Fortunately, the wind was light and fair, the ship a tough and tight one; and for the rest, everybody was grimy, greasy, and very good-humoured.

During the evening following their rescue, while the ship was slipping along quietly before the same steady easterly wind, Higginbotham strolled forward, and saw Christian sitting alone on a coil of rope, with his head resting against the rail.

‘Waal, John Dyson?’

Christian looked up without replying. He had washed away the traces of smoke and blood, and his face looked white and strange.

‘Hev you come to your cool senses, John Dyson,’ continued the skipper after a pause, ‘or air you still a-hatching mischief? I want to talk to you a bit. Out theer in the boat you said some one set my poor old ship afire?’

‘I said it, and I knew it.’

‘Speak out your mind. ’Tain’t for what I lost in her, though I had my share

in her timber and her cargo, but Lord knows I loved the old ship, and a bit of my heart went down in her when she sunk like a cinder into the sea. Speak out then, John Dyson! Dew you think she had foul play?’

‘I said it, and I think it.’

‘Waal, now, your reasons,—come?’

‘I will tell you what happened before the alarm was given. I had fallen asleep, sitting almost as you see me now. Suddenly I wakened, and saw, close to me, something like a man’s shape. It was dark, but light enough to see *that*. Then, before I could stir, or cry, or even think, I smelt the stench o’ fire, and saw black fumes of smoke rising all around. I tried to spring up, but my irons held me fast from flying, yet I shrieked to them sleeping around me, and they gave the alarm.’

‘Is that all, John Dyson?’

‘Is it not enough? Your good ship perished by fire, and *he* kindled it. The moment I saw his face in the boat, the moment I met his eyes, I knew ’twas he and no other. May hell consume him! May he answer for it in tenfold flame, when God judgeth quick and dead!’

The captain’s face was black as a thunder-cloud, as he listened. He said nothing more, but stood in gloomy meditation; then, muttering to himself ominously, he went aft, and gazed darkly over the vessel’s side.

But the more he thought, the less method he could find in Christian’s mad accusation. He knew the hatred between the two men, and he knew likewise how one would spare no pains to heap confusion upon the other. Still doubting and wondering, he sought out Richard Orchardson, and openly taxed him with the

infernal deed—prepared, if he confessed his guilt, to hand him over to the swift vengeance of the shipwrecked crew.

To his surprise, Richard assumed a high tone of indignant protestation; loudly proclaimed his innocence, and demanded to be brought face to face with his accuser; and finally stormed and wept so like an innocent man foully taxed and troubled, that the captain was completely thrown upon his beam-ends.

‘In the name of God,’ cried Richard at last, ‘what end could I serve by such devilry? The man did threaten my life, and you had him in irons; nay, you yourself could see that he was mad for blood as any wild beast. Do you think, man, that I was as mad as he? Did I hold my life so cheap, and care so little for the beloved companions of my voyage, that I sought to compass my own death, and

theirs, by an act worthy of yonder madman, not of me? I am a gentleman of good birth, law-loving and law-abiding. How dare you blacken me so with your base suspicion! How dare you blight my good fame, at the whisper of a gaol-bird, an outcast without a name!

This bluster overcame the good captain, who indeed saw no tittle of rational evidence to connect the speaker with the loss of his ship. On the very face of it, it seemed utterly improbable and inscrutable. Of all men living, Richard Orchardson seemed least likely to imperil his own life so insanely,

So Higginbotham walked forward, and found Christian sitting as he had left him, like the very image of despair.

'You air a liar, John Dyson!' he said, between his set teeth, and turned savagely away.



Meantime, a strange tumult was going on in Christian's soul. Though his body was possessed by a kind of brooding torpor, which caused him to remain for hours in the same position, like a shape of stone, his thoughts were tempestuous enough, but confused and broken, like cloud-phantoms reflected in a mere.

His sister's shame, his mother's death, his own wild flight from home, his life on shipboard, his interview with Priscilla, his attack upon his enemy, the fire by night, the sudden shipwreck,—all seemed like a troubled dream; and lo! there he sat, baffled, disregarded, no nearer to vengeance than before.

For despite the holy influence of his love for Priscilla, the thought of vengeance remained. To forget *that*, under any temptation, would have been to forget his father and his mother, all the sufferings of

their house, and above all, his sister's wrong. Not even Priscilla, not even the prospect of her love and divine compassion, could or should obliterate those memories. He had sworn an oath, and he meant to keep it. Richard Orchardson should die.

If his conscience needed stronger justification, it was found in his firm belief that Orchardson had fired the ship. He had no doubt whatever that this was so, though he had no proof that would satisfy any unprejudiced individual. Yes, Orchardson was guilty; another black record in the calendar of his hateful life.

And Christian, though he seemed tamed and unresolved for the time being, was merely accumulating venom and watching till the time came to strike. He saw little or nothing of his enemy; for Captain Higginbotham had contrived to

make his brother captain understand that 'John Dyson' was a dangerous lunatic, to be strictly watched, and above all, never suffered to come aft on any pretence whatever.

On first receiving this warning, the Dutch captain was for clapping him into irons immediately, but at Priscilla's intercession he refrained, and merely gave his crew orders to knock the madman on the head, if necessary. So Christian found himself avoided like a leper, as 'dangerous,' by the crew of both vessels. The only friendly face among them was that of the gigantic negro who had assisted to rescue him from the fire. This poor black had taken a fancy to him from the first, and still showed his sympathy to the best of his power.

To Christian, nursing his wrath and sorrow before the mast, Priscilla came

once and again. One of their conversations may be taken as a sample of several.

‘Oh, Christian, God is good. Let us pray to Him together.’

‘Nay, I am not one of the praying kind.’

‘But think of His great goodness and mercy. He held us in the hollow of His hand, and yet He spared us; think of that.’

‘I think rather that He suffered us to be cast away, through the device of a devil.’

‘Alas! therein do you show the madness of your hate. You should be just even to your enemy. Mr. Orchardson is innocent as I of the evil you cruelly lay at his door.’

Christian looked up with a strange expression.

'Then the devil hath been again at your ear! Priscilla, it will ever be so, until he is silent for ever.'

'That threat again, and that look which hath made me heart-sick so often! Oh, Christian, I fear you. He is right—you are mad indeed.'

'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, saith the Lord!'

'But we may not take the Lord's vengeance into our own wicked hands. Christian, promise me to forego your vengeance, or——'

'Go on.'

'Or I shall never again call you friend of mine.'

That gentle warning did not move him now, for all the sullen evil in his nature was awake. So he answered in a low voice,

'Even *that* will not change me. My

mother cannot sleep in her grave, my sister cannot look in the face of men, till they are avenged.'

So she left him, returning sad and tearful to her cabin.

Now, in her pretty anxiety to bring those two warring hearts together, she deepened the hate of both; since Richard Orchardson was watching her interviews with his rival, and Christian in his turn knew that she turned back from them to the other's counsel. Knowing Christian's violent disposition, and his readiness to think all evil against his enemy, she did not for a moment entertain his terrible accusation of arson; indeed, the fact that he had made it, to some extent hardened her heart against him—it seemed of a malignity so diabolic.

And during those days after the rescue, Richard Orchardson was so martyr-like

and so sad ; saying so little in reproach, looking so much ; that more than once meeting his eyes she sighed, and spoke to him gently, till some gentle answer came. In her heart she said, ' Both these men love me, and one methought I loved ; but I would trust my fate to neither ; for the one I could have chosen is dangerous and jealous to madness, and the other is too weak and full of suspicion.' Often in her heart she wished she were free of both.

But our tale must not linger with the thoughts of Priscilla Sefton, nor with the hopes and fears, the jealousy and hate, of the two men who had followed her across these waters. Strange events were to happen, to perplex still further the relations of all three ; and these events were to be determined by the fortunes and misfortunes of the ship that was bearing

them westward, to some undiscovered fate.

For several days the fair wind lasted. Then the vessel passed into a great sea-mist, covering troubled tracks of windless calm.

The moment this mist was reached, it became intensely cold ; the sails and cordage became stiff with frost, the decks slippery with ice. Looking over the side, they saw small fragments of broken ice floating upon the sea. Then it became dark ; so dark that all day long the ship's lights were kept burning, and the fog-horn loudly blowing.

At midday, the look-out man sang out that he could hear something like the sound of waters surging, and could see the gleams of breakers. The Dutch skipper rushed forward, and immediately shouted



out to the helmsman an order to 'keep away.' The order was obeyed only just in time ; and as the vessel swept round before the faint wind, all saw distinctly the surges thundering round a gigantic iceberg, which rose like a mountain in the midst of the sea. The next minute it was swallowed up in black fog.

It was now evident that they were in a position of some peril. In anticipation of north-west winds, which often prevailed at that season of the year, they had steered too northerly a course, and had consequently fallen in with drifting ice. To what extent they were surrounded, it was as yet impossible to tell. Shortening sail, and keeping a sharp look-out, they crept on through the darkness, waiting for the mist to clear.

All at once the wind began to rise, blowing in fitful squalls from the south-

east, but almost simultaneously the mist rose. Then they saw, by the light of a sullen sunset, with great bars of orange and red, like the skin of some wild beast, the sea on every side of them covered with loose bergs of all sizes, drifting southward; some sparkling with all the colours of the rainbow, others dark and shadowy as floating blocks of cloud.

Priscilla stood on deck, and gazed wonderingly on the strange sight, thinking only of its loveliness and novelty.

But Captain Higginbotham, who stood near her, was otherwise moved; for he saw in the neighbourhood of drifting ice, and in the rapidly rising wind, a new danger—not easily to be avoided by the Dutch skipper, for whose seamanship he had by this time acquired a supreme contempt.

‘Look, captain dear!’ cried Priscilla. ‘Are they not beautiful? That one is

like a great church, with blue vaults beneath, and a figure like an angel on the threshold ; and that other like a fair ship, with sails of crystal and masts of marble, crowded with folk in shining robes, singing " Holy, Holy ! " like the hosts in the Pilgrim's tale.'

' They're pretty enough to look at, missie,' returned the captain, ' but nasty customers to come agin when a ship's making nine knots an hour. I'd rather hev their room than their company, anyhow.'

So saying, he turned and joined his brother skipper, who was standing pipe in mouth on the poop, and regarding the bergs with a grin of total stupidity and unconcern. Conversation with him was impossible, and Higginbotham, after in vain trying to discover what course he meant to steer, left him, with an exclamation expressive of supreme disgust.

Night fell, but fortunately there was a moon, showing itself from time to time through drifts of flying cloud, and shedding even when itself unseen a faint atmospheric light. As the wind was still high, it was soon necessary to shorten more and more sail, until at last the ship was almost bare. At last it was determined to heave-to, which she did for the greater part of the night, with her head to the east and her maintopsail to the mast.

All the night the icebergs loomed on every side, sometimes coming so unpleasantly close that a man might almost have leapt upon them from the slippery decks. The sea all round, far as eye could behold, was black with their shadows.

It was soon obvious, however, that they were not a portion of any large pack, but merely a fleet of loose floes broken off and cast adrift by some storm or other

convulsion of nature. As the night advanced they grew less numerous, and before daybreak the nearest was several miles away.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE STORM.

BUT with daybreak came a new alarm.

The wind died almost completely away, but a tremendous swell was setting from the south-east, and in the same direction the gates of dawn were blocked by huge masses of black and purple cloud, layer on layer, flattened one upon another, while out of the dense mass rose a black vapour, like smoke from a funnel.

The Yankee skipper stood amidships, with William Long and several other of his own seamen, looking to the eastward.

‘What dew you make of them clouds, William Long?’

The sage addressed stuck his quid into the corner of his cheek, spat leisurely over the vessel's side, drew his shirt cuff across his mouth, and then replied,

‘Gale o’ wind from the sou’-east.’

‘Right you air, William Long. It’s been brewing hell and thunder in that theer witch’s caldron ever since last night, and now, though it ought to be bright day, there ain’t enough light to read a compass by; and d’ye hear *that*?’

As he spoke, there came from the heaving swell a heavy roar like thunder—the voice of the sea itself, ominously moaning. It was curiously dark; a troubled sense was in the air,

‘Like that strange silence which precedes the storm,  
And shakes the forest leaves without a breath.’

And now far away, between the layers of cloud, strange streaks of light were running like quicksilver. Whether they were day-

beams trying to break through the darkness, or flashes of sheet-lightning, it was difficult to tell.

Meantime the brig was rolling and tossing on the black billows like a thing in pain; her cordage creaking, her sails flapping with artillery-peals, her decks opening and shutting with the strain.

The waves came up smooth and unbroken, like black mountains rolling down to engulf the vessel, which was still hove to under the lightest of sail.

Just then the Dutch skipper appeared on deck, and in a loud voice gave his orders. As the crew flew to obey them, Higginbotham turned to his own men with a look of horror.

‘Look at that!’ he exclaimed. ‘If the ’tarnal Dutch lubber isn’t going to clap on canvas!’

Such was indeed the case. Springing



up the masts and into the rigging, the Dutchmen were already busy preparing to set sail.

Higginbotham rushed aft, confronted the skipper, and pointed eagerly to windward. The skipper smiled and nodded, and discharging a thick volume of smoke from his throat, gave an approving grunt. As he did so, the air was filled with an ancient and horrible smell, composed of rank tobacco and Schiedam.

Pale with rage, Higginbotham secured the services of the sailor who had previously acted as interpreter, and with his aid expressed an opinion that no one but a madman would unfurl a yard of canvas in the face of such weather-signs as confronted them.

Thus warned, the Dutch skipper smiled again, but more disagreeably. Then he said (through the interpreter) that he

knew his own business. There was no danger ; only a nice little fair wind coming out of the morning red. He knew how to sail a ship better than any 'Englander,' and he was afraid of nothing. Finally, he expressed a request, which the interpreter did not translate, that Higginbotham would go below—either in a narrow sense into the ship's cabin, or in the broad sense to a place that may be nameless, very far below indeed.

Scarcely had the Dutch skipper finished his speech, when a gigantic wave, lifting up the vessel like a cork into the air, swept him off his legs and rolled him into the lee scuppers. There he remained, without attempting to rise, either because the drink had mastered him, or because the shock had stunned him.

Almost simultaneously, the clouds to

eastward opened, a flash like sulphurous lightning lit up the dark heavens, and the ocean, a league to windward, appeared as white as milk.

In a moment, Higginbotham sprang on the poop, and shrieked to his own men,

‘All hands to shorten sail. If the Dutchmen interfere, chuck ’em into the sea! Quick, for your lives!’

Obeying the order as one man, the crew of the *Miles Standish* sprang up into the rigging. One glance to windward showed even the Dutch sailors that it was a matter of life and death. The storm was almost upon them, in all its fury.

Scarcely were the chief sails roughly stowed, than, with a shriek and a roar, the wind struck the vessel, while the water beneath and around her foamed to

boiling white. The bare masts bent like reeds, while the topsail, not being quite secured, burst loose, flapped, and was torn to ribbons in a moment and blown away. For a time the vessel hung broadside, with her lee bulwarks under, and the sea almost up to the main hatch.

Without a word Higginbotham sprang to the tiller-ropes, hurled the helmsman aside, took the tiller, and jammed the helm hard over. After a long struggle, the brig began to pay off; then, like a canoe shooting the rapids of some mighty river, she swept away before the blast.

Behind them, a black rift, opening as the mouth of some gigantic caldron, belched forth fire and water; fire and water of the surcharged thunder clouds, piled mass after mass upon each other; while in one portion of the night-black east, the vapours rolled

open and showed the bloodshot sun, glaring like a rayless eye upon the desolation. The rain covered the deck in torrents, and on the slippery waters, black from above and green from below, the lightning played in blinding beams.

Meantime the ship, blown bodily as if in the air between wind and water, smothered, choking, struggling, shrieking, like a living thing, the black clouds looming down upon her, the terrific seas surging up to destroy her, flew before the blast.

In the fury of this first onset, several men were washed overboard, and the Dutch skipper, who had risen to his feet, frenziedly gesticulating, would have followed their example, had he not been blown against the backstays, and flapped there like a limp and dripping rag.

‘The sea is rising!’ cried Higgin-

botham. 'There, forward! reef the foresail and set it!'

Assisted by the Dutch crew, his men obeyed him. The sea was rising indeed, and threatening to drown the vessel outright; but thanks to the foresail, they managed to heave her to for a little time, and rising and sinking in the tremendous sea, and lying over again almost to the main hatch, the brig fronted the tempest.

Below, Priscilla was on her knees by the side of her blind father; and in the midst of the frightened people, Richard Orchardson stood clinging to his berth, as white as death.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash, a thunderous roar. The vessel was covered in flying foam and fire, like flame and smoke. Then they saw the foresail shrivelling up like a shred of cotton, and blowing

away into the darkness ; while the vessel, with a wild lurch, came broadside to the sea.

For a minute it seemed as if all was over. She sank like a log into the trough of the sea, and one huge billow swept her from stem to stern, carrying away half-a-dozen shrieking lives. But again Higginbotham, though the water drenched him from head to foot, jammed the helm hard over, and again, with a shock like an earthquake running through her wooden frame, she paid off, and rushed away with the rushing waves before the blast.

There was now nothing for it but to let her run, and trust to chance.

Fortunately there was a ragged piece of foresail still remaining, and this served to keep her from broaching to. Higginbotham clung to the tiller with set teeth, though again and again the water, washing

over the stern, smothered him and tried to drag him from his post.

Two long days and nights that gale lasted, blowing the ship they knew not whither, but sweeping her still in a northerly direction. Even after the first day's storm ceased, and the great masses of cloud behind them began to move and come up slowly, like serried legions of some stormy host, the wind increased in violence, the seas still rose, and no sun was seen.

But on the morning of the second day, after they had flown at lightning speed hundreds upon hundreds of miles, the sun burst out through flying billows of cloud, and poured a faint yellow sulphurous spume upon the tossing sea.

The clouds now passed overhead swifter than the ship flew, and by that



sign they knew that the force of the gale was broken.

A new foresail was now bent on, and the vessel was able to 'heave-to' comfortably, and wait for the storm to subside.

'It's about time it *did* break!' muttered Captain Higginbotham to himself, as he glared with Cyclopean eye eastward. 'If we hed kep' on running a day and a night longer, guess we should hev come right jam smash agin the North Pole!'

Now that the danger seemed over, the Dutch skipper was at first inclined to be quarrelsome, and to put his brother skipper in irons for having mutinously taken possession of the management of the ship, but on reflection, after moistening his anger with a bottle of Schiedam, he thought it better to swear eternal friendship—which he did, with many hand-shakes and wild gesticulations.

While things were at this pass, Priscilla and her father tried to come on deck, accompanied by Richard Orchardson. During the fury of the gale, none of the passengers had been allowed to leave their quarters below; and now, at Higginbotham's solicitation, they did not come beyond the cabin companion.

Peeping from thence, Priscilla saw a knot of sailors gathered forward, and among them the powerful form of Christian.

During the tempest he had worked hard with the rest, never shrinking from any post of danger, and again and again putting his life in peril. In the wild tumult of the elements, he seemed for a time to forget his mad purpose,—and indeed he did so, for to think at all was difficult at such a season; all a man could do was struggle with all his bodily strength

against overpowering odds, oblivious of all save the fierce, almost mechanical fight for life.

The light brightened from yellow to pale pink, and the seas came along with slowly surceasing force. Before mid-day, the gale died away into a strong breeze, and it was possible to set easy sail.

The vessel, still dripping and struggling like a winged bird, had bowled along swiftly for several hours, when a cry arose forward of 'Land ahead!'

And sure enough, far away on the port bow, they saw the first loom of something black, like a low-lying bank of cloud.

An order was immediately given to take soundings, but no bottom was got with two hundred fathoms of line.

'Sure enough it looks like land,' said

Captain Higginbotham, while the order was given to stand off, as close to the wind as possible.

Presently, when the sun began to sink in the western heavens, its light flamed red on what had at first been taken for land, and showed what looked like a mountainous island, forty or fifty miles away. At that moment the old sailor, William Long, strolled aft.

‘Waal, William Long, what dew you make of that land?’

William Long clung to the backstay, and went through the usual formality of clearing his mouth of tobacco juice before he spoke.

‘I makes this of it, captain. It’s no more land than this here brig is land. It’s an iceberg, captain! and look’ee yonder!’—(as he spoke he lifted his right hand and swept the horizon to the north). ‘If

that ain't the *iceblink*, I've never been in these latitoodes afore.'

Far away along the northern horizon line there was a long strip of glimmering white, with occasional patches of dull yellow and quivering blue. William Long was an old whaler, and recognised the phenomenon in a moment.

Scarcely had he spoken, when there came, in corroboration of his words, a sudden crash, as if the vessel had struck upon some sunken rock. The brig trembled through all her timbers; and looking over the side, the seamen saw large fragments of broken ice bobbing up to the surface on each quarter. They had struck against a portion of submerged ice, and shivered it to fragments.

There could be no doubt now that they were in dangerous waters. If any further proof were wanting, they could

have told the close proximity of icefields by the rapidly falling temperature.

The sheets were stiffening, and flakes of frost, thin as gossamer, were forming on the sails.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## BESET BY THE ICE.

RAPIDLY taken observations showed them that they were somewhere in latitude  $50^{\circ}$ , longitude  $55^{\circ}$ , and that consequently the iron-bound coast of Labrador could not be far away. Tempestuous weather and Dutch seamanship had carried them out of their course many hundred miles.

Fortunately the wind now changed into the lightest of breezes, and they were able to steer a more southerly course; but again and again, after nightfall, they passed masses of floating ice, and several times struck with wild concussion against drifting fragments, but without serious damage to the *Anna's* oaken frame.

All hands of both crews were now on the alert; two men stood at the helm, extra hands were on the look-out, and the Dutch captain directed the ship's movements from the fore-castle deck, passing the word aft to 'port' or 'starboard' the helm as occasion rose, and thus avoiding fatal collisions. Despite all these precautions, the night was so dark, and the weather now so thick, that they were more than once in extreme danger.

When day broke again, they found themselves surrounded on every side by floating bergs and fields, with one green passage, about two miles broad, of comparatively open water. But right ahead to the westward was a frowning battlement of blackness which looked like land.

Meantime, the passengers below were faring but badly. Mr. Sefton was prostrate



in his berth with symptoms much resembling those of low fever, and Priscilla, worn with sickness and anxiety, looked the merest ghost of herself.

The foul air of the cabin, the coarse food, and the incessant vibration, had all told upon her delicate frame. Richard Orchardson was unceasing in his attentions to both father and daughter, but he too seemed succumbing to the hard and perilous life aboard ship.

To them presently came the Yankee captain, and at his solicitation Priscilla went on deck. Scarcely had she left the cabin, however, and come out into the chilly morning air, than she fainted away. Richard caught her in his arms, and gently carried her back to the cabin.

Scarcely had they disappeared, than the tall form of Christian, ragged, haggard, and wild, crept from behind the

mainmast, and seemed about to follow, when Captain Higginbotham interposed.

‘Waal, John Dyson?’ he cried, sternly.

‘What dew you want here?’

‘She is dying,’ answered Christian.

‘He hath killed her. Yes, it is his doing.’

‘Keep back, John Dyson. I have told you often, and I tell you now, your place is afore the mast.’

‘And I tell you that we are lost, and that we are lost through *him*. He fired your ship—why do you let him live?’

As he spoke his eyes were full of a light like that of madness; so at least it seemed to the good captain, who stubbornly shook his head.

‘Neow you jest take a friend’s advice, John Dyson. Go back to your work like a man, and don’t think of nought but helping me to get this ship safe to land. As for that young miss, remember she’s aboard,

and you'll have to answer to Almighty God for her life. Show you're a man, I say, and not a roaring he-b'ar.'

At that moment William Long's voice sounded from the forecandle :

'Land ahead!'

Without another word, the captain took Christian by the arm, and drew him gently to the fore part of the vessel ; he made no resistance, but obeyed as if stupefied and dazed.

Clear and distinct, right ahead, the land was now seen—a frowning line of crags and mountains, with black and purple shadows, looming distinct against the background of a pale grey sky. So cold and clear was the air, that this sombre coast seemed quite near, though it could not have been less than fifty or sixty miles away.

Land ahead ; on the one side of the

vessel fields of ice ever closing in ; and on the other—what ? More ice, in seemingly impenetrable lines of gigantic bergs rising beyond the drift ice and stretching far as eye could see.

There was a Babel of voices, as the Dutch and English-speaking crew clustered together and looked around. The Dutch skipper stood smoking his eternal pipe, with a look of stupid consternation.

Soundings were again taken. This time they reached the bottom, at a depth of one hundred and fifty fathoms.

Slowly and cautiously the ship worked along the edge of the line of bergs, looking for a lead to the southward. Once or twice she entered the ice, but only to retreat in time to avoid being cracked like a walnut-shell between bergs in motion. So she crept out again into the open water, and hung about like a bewildered bird.

Then it was suggested that she should put about and work back along the open passage by which she had entered the ice—a kind of huge trap, from which, as they soon found, there was no safe return. For no sooner had she turned, and sailed a few miles along the open water, than she found that enormous bergs, like things of life, had drifted down and blocked the passage, waiting with yawning jaws for her to enter among them and be crushed.

Like a duck in the funnel of a decoy, the brig fluttered this way and that way, but found no practicable outlet.

More than once she was in mortal peril.

As she approached one huge berg, a very mountain of shining whiteness, solid as marble, a portion of its side shifted and broke away—when, with a crash like thunder, the mighty mass toppled over,

within a hundred yards of the shuddering ship, deluging her with flying foam.

Night found her thus—a chilly, foggy night, in which the stiffened sails became hard as boards, showers of icicles fell from the frozen rigging at every change of position, and the decks became slippery with frost.

Turning again in the darkness, she ran along the edge of the ice; and now, as night advanced, there was a murmur in the air of rising wind—blowing this time from the northward, and coming so cold from the pole that it cut the cheek like a lash of steel and drew blood.

At daybreak, it was blowing half a gale.

‘What dew you think o’ this, William Long?’ asked Captain Higginbotham of that grizzled maritime authority.

‘I think as how we’re in a trap,

captain ; and if so be as winter's a-setting in early, there's little chance for that theer ice to clear. Unless we can bore a way through the loose ice yonder, we'll hev to go to bed like the snakes and wait for summer.'

But to attempt to bore southward just then was out of the question, for the northerly gale was still rising. By mid-day it blew with such fury that it was found necessary to run right in under shelter of the ice, and fix a couple of anchors to a solid berg.

This was done, with no little trouble and peril ; and thus anchored to solid masses which seemed drifting to windward, they saw smaller bergs and loose floes sweeping past like ships before the shrieking wind. On one of these loose fragments stood a huge she-bear, shrieking in terror or anger as she floated by.

Creeping again on deck from the solitude of the cabin, Priscilla saw the ship beset, while the ice-fields on every side were dyed crimson by the sun, which, pausing on the level horizon line, hung like a huge drop of liquid blood. Not far distant, to the westward, lay the land they had previously sighted, with thunderous surges breaking on its rocks, while higher up its lurid mountain-heights flashed back the sunset's bloodshot beams. Innumerable terns and kittiwake gulls were hovering over the vessel, many quite fearlessly alighting on its yards, as tame as doves; and in the open water close by, flocks of seals were disporting.

There was a roar in the air above of shrieking wind, and a sound all round of surge and crashing ice, but down on the deck there was comparative shelter from the fury of the gale. Priscilla crept to the



Yankee skipper's side, and reaching out her hand, softly touched his arm. She said nothing, but looked around with a strange awe and wonder, mixed with maidenly fear.

Then she shivered, for the air was icy cold.

'You'd best keep below, missie,' said the kindly skipper. 'This air ain't fit for tender lungs to breathe. I've seen the north wind bring blood from a man's chest afore now.'

'Why are we staying here?'

'I'll tell you, missie. We're beset by the ice, and what's more, there's a north-erly gale blowing. If them anchors slipt, we should drive down on the bergs to lee'ard, and this ship's shell ain't tough enough to stand *that*, I reckon.'

At this moment Richard came up, and a sharp gust sweeping the deck, Priscilla

clung to him. He put his arm around her waist to support her, and in her anxiety, she did not attempt to free herself from his hold.

So for a space they stood, while a pair of jealous eyes, gazing from the fore-castle, watched them with a new and aching despair.

Then Christian thought, 'She loves him! He hath poisoned her heart against me, and she loves him!'—and he could have killed them both.

'Do you think there is danger?' asked Richard wistfully, still supporting her.

The skipper did not answer. He was never the man to lie, and he did not care to awaken useless fears, especially in the heart of his favourite. He thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his sailor's jacket, and glared with his one eye at the sunset, as if in gloomy speculation.

Then he turned away, and going forward, saw Christian watching, like a wild beast preparing to spring. So the wary skipper placed himself in a convenient attitude, ready to interfere with brute force if the man meant mischief, as he feared.

Now, something in their common danger brought the hearts of the young man and maid together, as they stood there on the chilly deck.

‘You are cold,’ said Richard softly. ‘Let me fetch you something warm to cover you.’

‘Nay, I am not cold,’ she answered ; then she added, with tears in her voice, ‘O Richard, I fear for my father ! He is so old, and he seems so ill. If he should die——’

She paused, for the tears choked her.

‘He will not die,’ returned Richard

cheerfully. 'We shall soon escape from this terrible place, and find a haven.'

'Pray God it may be so!—but if evil should come to him, I should die too. Now my dear mother is dead, he is my only friend and protector.'

'Say not so. You have one other.'

'None that I love so much, none to content me if he were gone.'

He held her more closely, and under the inspiration of the moment, whispered eagerly,

'You have one who loves you more than all the world—one who would protect you with his life, one who for your sake has forsaken father and fatherland, is with you now, and will be with you till the end.'

Trembling now, she tried to release herself, but he held her fast.

‘Do not hold me!’ she cried. ‘Let me go back to him!’

‘Am I not forgiven?’

‘Forgiven—what? Prithee let me go!’

‘Stay a little yet,’ said Richard; then in a voice of solemn earnestness he continued, ‘Sweetheart, we may never leave these cruel shores alive. This ice may be our tomb. Nay, tremble not; for if it were, I for one should die peacefully, if I were certain of your sweet love. Without that, life is nothing; with it, death would be divine.’

She looked at him in wonder. His pale face was shining, his eyes full of overmastering passion.

‘This is no time to talk of such things. Rather pray to God, Who holds us in the hollow of His hand;’ and again she tried to disengage herself from his circling arm.

‘I have prayed—I pray—to God, for one thing only—yourself, Priscilla!’

At last she released herself, but pausing, looked again into his face.

‘I shall never marry. If God in His mercy spares us, my place will still be with my father. Do not speak of it again.’

The words were decided enough, but the tone was so gentle, the look so kind, that Richard might well smile to himself as the delicate figure flitted away. Flushed and wild with passion, he hung over the ship’s side, and looked at the wintry scene around him.

He did not believe that there was imminent danger, but he had not lied when, in the fervour of passionate feeling, he had sworn that he could face death in Priscilla’s company. Still, his dream now was of sunshine and a fair haven,

with the maiden's love as his excellent reward.

And all this time the other's eyes were watching, with a feverish desire. Christian did not stir, though the impulse to do so was strong upon him; but his face was set in terrible resolve. In his heart of hearts, he too was praying to God.

'He has robbed me of everything, even her love. His life, O God—give me his life! It is forfeit to me already. God of justice, if there be God indeed, give me his life!'

Night fell; and with night came, borne down in the lap of the gale, whirlwinds of blinding snow, snow so thick that it smothered mast and rigging, drifted in great heaps upon the deck and against the bulwarks, and clothed the shivering seamen with garments of whiteness. And

now the wind came in blasts so terrible that again and again the vessel was in danger of being torn away from the shelter of the solid ice, which groaned and crashed around her like mountains upheaved by earthquake.

But as soon as an anchor dragged, the men sprang out, and at peril of their lives made it fast again, digging holes for the fluke with their hatchets, in the firmest portions of the berg. As they worked thus, the snow drifted over and almost smothered them, and two men disappeared into chasms of the ice, never to appear again.

At last the snow ceased, after having fallen for hours, and there came a faint starlight, in which the ship loomed strange and phantomic, shrouded in silver, with half-frozen snow hanging like bearded icicles to its masts and rigging, and its



decks spread with a thick carpet of whiteness. Above, the cold heaven glittered as with innumerable points of bluish steel; while the ice all around assumed fantastic shapes, with vast shadows and flying gleams of silver and azure.

But though there was not a cloud in the zenith, the blast blew from the Cold Clime with never-ceasing force.

At midnight, there came other perils, in which all others were forgotten.

All at once, as if at some concerted signal, the whole framework of the solid floe began to move and close in upon the ship.

Sharp reports like those of artillery, but infinitely deeper and more terrible, resounded on every side, while here and there, with a force like that of earthquake, the ice was torn into mighty fissures, up which the blue water spouted and flowed.

Between wind and water the tumult was stupefying.

Then the ice closed in with slow and pitiless strength, till it held the ship as in a vice.

A cry went up from the terrified sailors, for the solid ribs of oak began to crack and yield like the shell of a breaking egg.

Fortunately the pinch came very slowly, and the ship's timber was unusually tough and strong; while, thanks to large portions of yielding floating ice which surrounded her on every side and acted as a sort of fender, she did not actually come in contact with the main body of the floe.

Preparations were at once made for the worst. Orders were given to get the boats out upon the ice, and to land such provisions as might be necessary in the

event of the ship's destruction. Barrels of meal and salt junk, kegs of spirits, bags of biscuits, were passed from hand to hand and thrown out upon the ice. Men shouted, women screamed, but all voices were drowned in the elemental tumult.

Pale as death, Richard Orchardson accosted Captain Higginbotham, who stood directing the movements of his own crew, moving about like shrieking ghosts in the dim light.

'Is the ship doomed?' he cried.  
'Must we take to the ice?'

'We're in the Lord's hands,' replied the skipper. 'This ain't no time for talking. If you're a man, lend a hand!'

Thus urged, Richard clambered over the ship's side, and joined the busy crowd who were passing things from hand to hand across the loose ice. Despair and

terror gave him strength ; he leapt eagerly to a place, and was soon as busily employed as the rough crew.

Upon them as they were thus busily engaged burst another storm of blinding snow, so thick and heavy, that it became pitch dark, and they could not see each other or even the outline of the ship. The men shrieked to each other in terror, some threw themselves upon their faces to avoid being swept away, others clung wildly to each other.

With a sharp cry of fear, Richard struggled back towards the ship, but as he moved, the solid ice seemed to crumble beneath him, and he heard the roar of surging water.

At this moment he dimly saw standing close to him a white shape, like the shape of a man. In the extremity of his fear, he tottered to it and clutched it wildly.

'Help!' he gasped.

Scarcely had he uttered the cry, when he felt himself lifted as if by superhuman strength and carried rapidly across the ice. His head swam, a new and nameless horror possessed him, but he still clung frantically to the shape which carried him.

Through the blinding drift he was swiftly hurried. As a lioness might carry off a child, or as a mighty polar bear might carry off a small seal, the shape carried him away.

He looked wildly round for the ship, but could see nothing but blinding whiteness. Then he struggled to release himself, but was held in a clutch like that of iron.

'Help!' he shrieked again.

It seemed like some hideous dream. The shape still ran with him across the

solid ice, in the teeth of the flying drift, the biting blast.

Then, sick with terror, he swooned away.

When he opened his eyes, he was lying prone. The snow had ceased, and the starlight again shone faintly down. He looked up, and saw standing before him, wrapt from head to foot in snow, a tall human shape.

Then a white face was pressed down close to his, and while a hot breath touched his cheek, a voice hissed these words :

‘AT LAST!’

## CHAPTER XV.

## 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE.'

IN a moment he had recognised his mortal enemy. With a wild cry he leapt to his feet, and looked round for the ship. But no ship was visible: only on every side gigantic hummocks of ice and snow.

He turned and would have flown; but Christian gript him by the throat.

'Stand and listen! I could have slain you in your swoon, but that would have been too merciful. Look in my face! quick! do you know me?'

'Yes!'

'Remember my broken-hearted father !  
remember my betrayed sister ! remember  
my murdered mother !—remember all  
these, and remember her whose heart  
you have turned against me, before I  
kill you.'

'Help ! you will not murder me !'

'Cry, but no one can hear you. The  
ship lies yonder, a mile away. I have  
brought you hither to make expiation.  
You hear ?'

'For the love of God——'

'He has given you into my hands.'

'No, no !—do not harm me ! I will  
do whatever you wish—I will abandon  
my pursuit of Miss Sefton—yes, I will  
make amends.'

'Can you bring back the dead to life ?  
Can you heal the hearts you and yours  
have broken ? Devil !'



As he spoke, he compressed his grip upon the other's throat, so that he could not speak.

'Answer me one thing, before I kill you. Did you not fire the ship? Answer!'

He released his grip, and the answer came in a wild negative, while Richard fell crying upon his knees—

'No, no!'

'Before God?'

'Before God.'

Using a fierce oath, Christian struck him in the face with his open hand. He fell back shrieking.

'Another lie, to help sink your soul to the pit of hell!'

As Christian spoke, there came from the distance the faint report of a gun; after a moment's interval, it was followed by a second report, and by a third.

'You hear?' he cried with a terrible laugh. 'They miss you already, but they cannot save you. Nothing can save you now.'

But the sound of the gun, and the knowledge that help was not far away, seemed to give Richard strength and speed. He leapt to his feet, and before the other could touch him, fled in the direction of the sound.

It was a race for life, for Christian followed close behind him, and almost struck him as he ran. Under ordinary circumstances, he was the fleeter, and terror lent him wings. He increased the distance between them at every step.

Over the slippery ice, between the frowning hummocks, twisting, turning, he fled for life. Once he heard his pursuer stumble and fall, but he heard him

spring up again in a moment, and follow like a bloodhound.

Another gun from the ship. He rushed wildly on.

Suddenly, as he fled, he saw before him a long blue line of gleaming water—a fissure like a narrow stream, in the very heart of the ice. There was no time to turn, so he rushed on towards it; and as he came near, he saw to his despair that it was too broad to leap.

But Christian was close behind. Richard flew to the very edge, and pausing there in horror, threw up his hands and turned his face toward his enemy.

As he did so, the loose ice crumbled under his feet, and with a shriek he disappeared.

Christian paused in time, and gazed with wild eyes towards the water. Then,

in the dim light, he distinctly saw the head of Richard re-emerge, while his hands with dying strength clung to the slippery ice, and a last wild cry for help rose into the air.

He answered with a horrible laugh, and leaving his enemy to die, passed away in the direction of the ship.

As he went, another black cloud came up behind the fields of ice, and another storm of snow came sweeping out of it. But still he groped his way in the right direction; and at last, as the shower thinned, and the dim light came out again, discerned the vessel in her old position, a quarter of a mile away

Scarcely had his eyes fallen upon her, when a shock like earthquake ran through the whole body of ice on which he was standing, and simultaneously he

saw the portion of the floe to which the ship was fastened detach itself and crumble like a heap of sand.

Nothing was to be seen but blinding ice-smoke.

When it cleared, Christian saw that the ship had broken loose, and was sweeping, amid the flotsam and jetsam of shattered ice, right out into the open water—drifting broadside, without a rag of sail, and careening frightfully to leeward under the pressure of the wind.

He rushed on towards the edge of the ice.

Before he reached it, another cloud came up, with another storm of snow.

He stood blinded, waiting for the fall to cease. When it did so, he gazed with wild eyes out on the open water.

The bergs were flashing and the surge

was sounding, but the ship had disappeared.

He was left alone upon the fields of ice!

END OF VOL. II.

